THE VICTIMS TRIUMPH

JOSEPHINE ZEMAN

Her beautiful face and figure were displayed to the greatest possible advantage. —*Page 44.*

The Victim's Triumph

A Panorama of Modern Society

BY

JOSEPHINE ZEMAN

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Preface

IN giving this book to the public a few words seem called for, in view of the apparent briefness, not to say abruptness with which some of its scenes and characters are brought to a close. In explanation I desire to say that the story is based upon facts. Truth is stranger than fiction, and my aim has been to present things as they often happen in life rather than attempt a work of art through the imagination. I have dealt with incidents and occurrences that have come under my observation, in as short, concise and realistic a manner as possible. Where facts are in plenty fiction seems superfluous. I have tried to avoid all excess of baggage and sharply draw the line where realism ceases and fiction begins.

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The Victim's Triumph

CHAPTER I

AT THE CLUB

IT was a cold night in December. All day long New York had been in the throes of a fierce blizzard, which, having first wreaked havoc in Nebraska and other Western towns, had come East, as if to remind us of the frigid experience we had with one of its relatives in 1888.

The sun, after a brief smile upon the city, had hidden his face in disgust behind a leaden sky. Night came, and with it another fall in the temperature; causing those blessed with any sort of a home to cheerfully stick to it. It was too cold for more snow, and the little that had fallen the day before had frozen almost immediately, forming a

hard, icy crust which made walking difficult, and caused a crunching sound 'neath foot or wheel. A full moon beamed brightly down upon the scene.

Alongside the curb on upper Fifth Avenue stood, sphinx-like, a solitary cab, probably awaiting some venturesome youth whose ardent spirit even this arctic night had been unable to congeal. The driver sat motionless, completely buried in the folds of a voluminous fur overcoat, from which protruded, chimney-like, his stovepipe hat.

The horse, poor beast, stood shivering in the cold, unprotected save by a thin blanket, which might just as well have been left off, for all the good it did. Its thoughts — for horses have thoughts—could have been in nowise eulogistic of the human family. The dejected look in the animal's eyes, the relaxed lower jaw, and ill-fed, ungroomed appearance in general, bore mute evidence of a life of ceaseless labor, hardship and suffering, endured solely to fill the pockets of a heartless master; for, though we may not realize it, the inner life, the hopes and fears of our dumb friends, are readily seen in their actions, appearance and

behavior. Thus the poor animal, as it stood shivering in the cold, plainly expressed utter resignation to an inevitable fate: viz., a few years more of hardship, old age, or, perhaps, a broken limb at the hands of some careless motorman; a morbid crowd, a policeman's bullet, and then—oblivion.

In sharp contrast with this dismal scene, the upper windows in one of the exclusive bachelor clubs near by sent forth a flood of light, which reflected in a thousand multicolored sparks upon the snow-covered street below, showing that sleep was still a stranger to these devotees of single blessedness; who, perhaps, had been unable to tear themselves away from the fascinations of the fragrant Havana, the wine, or the game.

In the sumptuous smoking-room within, three men in evening dress were gaily chatting near a huge fireplace of artistic design, wherein a bright fire was burning. They had evidently spent the earlier part of the night at the play, from whence they had sojourned uptown to the club, to smoke, drink and talk. They were chums, and had known each other for a number of years.

Lord Brighton, the elder of the three, was a man of about forty-five, but looked somewhat younger. In appearance and manners he was a typical Englishman, with a ruddy complexion, large, regular features, and of heavy build. He was a man who might have passed unnoticed but for the color of his hair, which was of that indescribable hue sometimes seen on actresses who use "Peroxide" one season, to obtain the regulation shade of bright yellow, and sage tea the next, to turn it into the Leslie-Carter tint. As to character, Lord Brighton was one of those men who firmly believe that their advent marked an epoch in the world's history, and that they are the storm-centre about which the universe revolves. He was immodestly proud of his large wealth and comparatively new title, and belonged to that type known in France as *Les nouveaux riches*. Had Lord Brighton been a poor man, he would have been dubbed "coarse"; as it was he was termed "eccentric." Like the majority of his compatriots, he had hobbies; not lawn tennis, golf, or the like; far from it. His pet hobby was a supreme contempt for woman,

and the feminine sex in general; which contempt amounted almost to a mania. Indeed so bitter did he become in his denunciation of the fair sex at times, that it caused his friends to suspect, that at some period of his life, he had been the dupe of some especially clever woman, which suspicion was greatly strengthened by the vehemence with which he was wont to assert that no woman could ever impress him. Such, in brief, was Lord Oliver Brighton, of London, England, who now leisurely reclined in an easy chair, extracting large volumes of smoke from the business end of a perfecto, and then sending it curling up against the hand-painted plafond of the smoking-room.

A different man altogether was Bob Armstrong, a retired banker and broker. Mr. Armstrong or "Bob," as he was familiarly known to his friends, was strictly a self-made man whose every movement bespoke culture and refinement. He was tall, well made, about thirty-five years of age and of distinguished appearance. His eyes were large and black, and formed a most engaging contrast to his silver-gray hair and mustache. His features

though aquiline were distinctly of American type; they denoted great kindliness, but likewise courage, intellect and firmness of decision; indeed, these latter were the qualities that had in years past made the name "Armstrong" a factor in Wall Street. Mr. Armstrong's life had been an eventful one. At the age of thirty he had married a lady of great beauty and intellect, to whom he was profoundly attached, but whom he lost by death after three years of unalloyed happiness. Since then, Bob had been a confirmed bachelor, spending all of his leisure time either travelling or at the club. He was now seated between his friends, absent-mindedly tearing an old envelope into small pieces, which he rolled into miniature balls and cast into the fire, while he attentively watched the eager flames lick up the fresh material. There was a sad, ruminating expression on his handsome face, as though this evening reminded him of bygone happy days at his own fireside.

The remaining member of the trio was Chauncey Lamont, the son of a wealthy merchant, and a typical gilded youth, whose chief occupation in life

seemed to centre in the strenuous effort he made to spend his father's money faster than the latter could earn it; an occupation in which he appeared to succeed fairly well. But though Chauncey was a gay young man, fond of life in all its phases, a devotee of sports in general, with a decided penchant for the stage and its femininity, he was not a bad boy at heart, and was universally popular.

Chauncey was tall, rather above the ordinary height, and, apparently, admirably proportioned. He was fair-haired, with features clean cut and rather fine of finish; their habitual expression suggested a capacity for ready wit. His light mustache flourished upward, as if blown that way by the breath of a constant smile. That mustache was to him a source of great pride and much preoccupation, upon which he spent more time and care than the average mother bestows upon her first born. Taken altogether there was something benevolent and picturesque in his physiognomy. In this respect his face was singular. It was not at all serious and yet it inspired the liveliest confidence. Just now he was puffing away on a cigar-

ette, while glancing over the programme of the evening's performance, which he had brought from the theatre, and endeavoring to find some familiar name among the artists named thereon. Throwing away the programme he suddenly exclaimed:

"Well, gentlemen, "what's your verdict of the play?"

"Capital!" observed Bob Armstrong.

"Can't say I like it, dontcherknow!" ejaculated Lord Brighton, with a puff on his cigar.

"Oh, I don't see why," resumed Bob, with a shrug of his shoulders. "I think the play is all right, and the work of the star extremely clever. She is undoubtedly a good actress and a beautiful woman."

"You bet!" put in Chauncey enthusiastically.

"Clever?" repeated Lord Brighton with a cynical smile. "'Pon my word, Bob, I can't see, dontcherknow, how you can fancy the work and looks of that blonde person in black velvet. By Jove! it couldn't happen in England, dontcherknow! Her gowns were positively scandalous. I say, positively scandalous!"

"Can't see what objection you have to the lady's gowns," animatedly rejoined Bob. "She dresses in accordance with the requirements of the part she portrays, which is that of an adventuress, and, certainly, not immodestly so. At any rate, no more so than do the ladies of our own set at their dinners and balls. As to the play, it is strictly a modern problem-play, hence quite realistic."

"Well, Bob, you don't know actresses as I know them," quickly replied Lord Brighton, determined to force his opinion upon his friend.

"Cut it!" dryly observed Chauncey.

"But—aw—I say," obstinately continued Lord Brighton, "I don't care to see any woman upon the stage; 'pon my word I don't! 'Tisn't her place, you see! Women ought to stay at home, where they belong, and attend to the house and the nursery."

"Oh, Lord! when they *do* I want to be *dead*," interrupted Chauncey with mock earnestness.

"Yes," broke in Bob, "and spend their sweet young lives making biscuits and tea for beef-eating Englishmen like yourself! Oh, come, come, old

man! Why don't you be honest, and say that you hate all women, and look upon them as a necessary evil at best. Think what you please, Brighton, but remember that there are surely some good women upon the stage, as there are in every walk of life. Besides, there is something in this particular woman's face and bearing that commands respect. You know I have been through the mill, and am not the kind of a man to be taken in by the face of every pretty woman I meet, even though she be an actress; but when I gazed upon that sad face, especially during the pathetic scenes, I could have wagered my soul's salvation that, though young and beautiful, she has passed through a world of sorrow and despair."

"Bravo, Bob! shake hands, old man! I couldn't have said it better in a thousand years!" heartily exclaimed Chauncey, grasping his friend's hands. "You've hit the nail on the head!"

"'Pon my word, boys, you have my sympathy, dontcherknow, and if I didn't know you both as sensible fellows, I should say that you are both 'hard hit.' But, I say again, no woman's face will

ever deceive me. It can't be done! They are false, one and all, and only do the angel act—when they want something. All women are born actresses, and, if I do say so myself, the woman who can fool Lord Brighton does not live."

Bob merely shrugged his shoulders, knowing from experience that argument was a useless expenditure of energy against this man's monumental British obstinacy.

"Can't be fooled, eh?" repeated Chauncey, with a knowing wink at Bob. "Well, may be so, old man; but I know a lady that would play ping pong with your heart inside of thirty minutes, and without an effort."

"Who is she? What is she like?" queried Lord Brighton with lazy incredulity, yet interested despite himself.

"Like nothing you ever saw!"

"I am sure I am much obliged, dontcherknow."

"She is the Countess Ivanovitch, who is universally considered the most beautiful and fascinating creature that ever happened in New York City," replied Chauncey.

"Do you know her?" queried Bob.

"Yes, I met her at Mrs. Gardner's dinner, and there wasn't a man in the crowd—myself included—who wouldn't have left his happy home or robbed a bank for this ravishing creature."

"Scandalous, positively scandalous, 'pon my word," soliloquized Lord Brighton. "But I say, Chauncey, just to show you, dear boy, that she'll never impress me, arrange an introduction, dontcherknow, and then watch me."

"Just so!" replied Chauncey. "I'll steer you up against her brother, who's a jolly good fellow. You'll meet him, he'll introduce you to her, and there you are."

"Oh, she's got a brother, has she?" inquired Lord Brighton.

"Indeed she has," affirmed Chauncey. "And his word is law with her; so if you wish to reach the Countess it will have to be done *via* the brother. But I'll attend to that part of it; besides, we are all invited to the Pennybaker ball next week and so is the Countess; then I will see that both you and Bob are introduced."

"By the way, Chauncey," here interrupted Bob, "what did you mean a while ago by the remark that 'I had hit the nail on the head' when I spoke of the actress we saw on the stage to-night?"

"I meant," replied Chauncey, suddenly losing his gay demeanor, "that you were quite right when you said you had discerned real sorrow and sadness in her face."

"How so?" eagerly queried Bob.

"Why, because," continued Chauncey, "that young girl has had sorrows that would have killed an ordinary woman. I'll tell you her story, as it was told me by one of my newspaper friends who knew her well, if you care to hear it."

"I certainly do," replied Bob Armstrong."

"Go ahead," yawned Lord Brighton, bored at having to listen to the story of a woman's life. "But, I say, let's have some cocktails and some cigars;" and suiting the action to the word he summoned the waiter and gave his order.

The liquor was brought and disposed of, fresh cigars were lighted, a new supply of fuel added to the fire, and soon the trio was once more comfort-

ably ensconced in their easy chairs, ready to listen to Chauncey's story.

"About ten years ago," began the latter, "there was among the regular staff of artists at the Imperial Opera House at Berlin, a singer, who, by reason of his good looks, fine physique and phenomenal voice, was a popular favorite, especially among the ladies; for it is a strange fact that women will idolize actors—just because they are actors. In this case the man in question had the great advantage of being not only a great artist as well as fine looking, but likewise a man of superior intellect and good education. 'Twas no wonder, therefore, that he was the idol of all the ladies, which so affected this great singer that it required an extra size hat to fit him. One day, however, he met among the society girls, who raved about him, bought his photographs and spent their pin-money to send him flowers, a girl of quite a different stamp. She was young, beautiful, educated and well bred. And though it seems sacrilegious to state that an actor can form, temporarily even, a real affection for any one woman, the un-

expected happened in this case, for this artist was so greatly impressed with the young woman's charms that during a moment of absent-mindedness he married her. In doing so, the young woman had—on his advice—overlooked the insignificant formality of asking parental consent. Thus her secret marriage became a pink tea when compared to the stupendous undertaking of acquainting papa and mamma with the facts. Yet, it had to be done, for though great singers live, professionally speaking, upon 'airs,' their material subsistence require cold cash. At any rate, this artist, despite his rather large salary, felt financially too small to take care of both himself and his wife, so he confidentially advised her to confess the awful truth to her parents. Like the dutiful wife she was, she obeyed, and conveyed the intelligence of her secret marriage unto her parents. At first the latter were speechless with amazement at the revelation. When they did find words to express their thoughts they were totally unfit for publication. What they did insist upon, however, was that their home was not big enough to hold

both themselves and the wife of an opera singer. What did it matter that the sweet little wife of a few weeks happened to be their only daughter, and that she had married her husband because she loved him? Was it not far easier to put the daughter out of the house than to face social ostracism by telling the Privy-Supreme-Court-Counsellor So and So, or tell the wife of the Imperial Ex-Chief-Chamberlain This and That, that their only daughter had married a man of melodies? Hence, within two weeks more, the erstwhile only daughter of wealthy parents found herself a stranger to her former home. Her husband at first did his best to take care of her, and, for a time, succeeded quite well; but like most artists known to fame, he soon tired of the obligations if not of the bonds that curtailed his personal expenditures. His behavior towards his wife began to show punctures here and there, and when, shortly afterwards, he was offered a good engagement as leading tenor in this country, at nearly triple the salary he drew in Germany, he quickly packed his grip, gave his dear, confiding little wife some money, and more advice,

promised to write to her early and often, and gaily sailed away to this country. Out of sight out of mind! At home, alone, abandoned and forsaken by all, the poor little woman learned then the bitter truth that the world has no pity for the unfortunate. To add to her sorrows, she approached that critical period in a woman's life where she fulfills the noblest duty of her destiny—motherhood. Alas! the poor little wife, whose heart—despite her husband's perfidy—could not despise the man to whom she had given all that life holds dear to a woman, gathered together what she had left of worldly possessions, sold some trinkets, which she had vowed never to part with, and with the proceeds—barely sufficient to pay for her passage—came to New York, hoping to find her faithless husband. Upon inquiry she learned that he was *en route*, at the head of a company, and at that time in Pennsylvania. She likewise learned that another had, long since, supplanted her in his affections, and that the money he should have devoted to her support he spent upon this new fancy. But though her heart was breaking, and her bodily

sufferings acute, her loyal soul never wavered, and she resolved to go to her husband and bring him to his senses by imparting the sweet secret to him. Towards the latter part of May, 1889, she left New York, using her remaining funds for a ticket to Johnstown, Pennsylvania, where her husband was to appear the following day. Upon reaching there she learned that his company was due late that night. Can you fancy the thoughts that filled this poor woman's heart? Can you picture her many conflicting emotions? Was she not there alone—penniless in a strange country? Would he be man enough to do his duty by her? Or would he spurn her—and crush out the little spark of hope that still remained in her bosom?

"In due time her husband's company arrived. With a heavy heart and trembling hands the poor young wife dispatched a messenger to the theatre, informing him of her arrival, and asking him to come to her. An answer came, and in her misery she fervently prayed to Him who sees all that it might bring her happiness. It contained but a few laconic words, scribbled in haste, and read:

'Will be there after the performance.' No signature was appended; still, it was his handwriting, and her heart leaped with joy. With feverish emotion she awaited his coming. At 11.30 she heard his heavy step in the hall of the inexpensive hotel where she was staying. Her heart bounded. The door was flung open, and—she lay upon his breast. Faithless and fickle though he was, he could not resist the poor woman's rapturous joy—despite his perfidy—on seeing him again. Perhaps it was that 'silent voice,' which at that moment spoke in thunderous tones within him; perhaps it was the hand of fate that caused him to feel the pangs of remorse for his ill-treatment of her. Who knows? And she—the poor little woman—never once reproached him with his misconduct, or complained of the many hardships she had endured. She knew but one thing—she loved him, and he was with her—as she blushingly whispered her secret into his ear. Her sublime faith, after months of misery and neglect at his hands, and the fact that she had come thousands of miles to be with him during the ordeal she was about to face, touched even his cold

heart, now filled with the image of another. He gently kissed her upturned face, smoothed her feverish brow and spoke words of encouragement. But the worry and excitement of the last few days, together with the privations she had suffered and the suspense of the evening's vigil for his coming, had been too much for her delicate health. She was taken violently ill, and a doctor was summoned. For several days after the babe was born the poor woman lay unconscious and at the point of death. When she finally recovered consciousness on the fourth day her mind had temporarily given way under the strain. During all that week her husband had to appear nightly with smiling face, while she struggled between life and death among strangers. To add to his troubles, Dame Rumor, in some mysterious way, had spread the story of his infidelity and his wife's arrival. The tale gained in virulence as it was passed on. Like the tiny snowball that grows in volume as it rolls down the hill, and finally reaches the valley an avalanche dealing death and destruction, so the story of this man's infamy spread and increased, causing great

public indignation, until he, the erstwhile matinee idol of silly women, found himself hissed at every appearance and openly insulted. But though his misdeeds nearly shipwrecked him professionally, the incident served one good purpose. It brought him to his senses, and he vowed to henceforth be a better man. Was it fear, was it pity, or was it, perhaps, the little white bundle of humanity quietly sleeping in the small crib in the dingy room of the hotel? It was never known. For who can fathom the ways of inscrutable fate? Fate, which as surely as there is a sun in heaven, sooner or later metes out just punishment to all transgressors alike. His repentance, however, came too late, for in the terrible disaster which, on the morning of May 31, 1889, almost swept the city of Johnstown off the face of the earth, the artist, who at the time was rehearsing at the theatre, was one of the victims; whereas both mother and child in some miraculous way escaped destruction. Happily for the poor woman, her mind at that time was benighted, else the shock of this new misfortune would have killed her. Several days later, when the waters began

to subside, her husband's terribly mangled body was found. Kind souls took pity on the unfortunate mother and babe and transferred them to more congenial surroundings, where, after many months of suffering, she finally recovered health and reason. When the tragic fate of her husband was told her it proved a terrible blow. Had it not been for the blue-eyed little cherub—whose baby-lips began to lisp the word 'mamma,' that sound which falls like heavenly music on a woman's ear—who knows but she, too, would have sought oblivion for her sorrows in death. With nothing left in the world to claim as her own, save her girl babe, she bestowed upon it all the affections of her sympathetic heart, and as time wore on she had the indescribable pleasure of seeing the little one growing up into a beautiful girl. Then came a new sorrow. The little money kind friends had saved for her from the sale of her husband's jewelry, together with some life insurance she had received, was about exhausted, and she was confronted by the problem of how to subsist. She had no training in the ways and means of earning a livelihood;

her only hope lay in the fine education she had received, so she daily scanned the papers in quest of a position as governess. But no one wanted a woman with a child, no matter what her qualifications. True, some positions were offered her by so-called bachelors, but in nearly every instance she found that these 'ads.' were misleading, and their motives doubtful. One day she noticed an advertisement requiring a handsome young woman to pose for a well-known artist. In her desperation she confided her little girl to the care of a neighbor and applied for the position. She was young and beautiful; and her face had that soft, melancholy expression which misery and heartache seldom fail to impart to a woman's countenance. It was just what the artist wanted, and, to her delight, she was engaged at a fair salary. He was a good man, who found inspiration in the face of this well-bred, handsome model, so vastly different from her average colleague. With true maternal pride she told him one day of her sweet babe-girl. He asked her to bring the child to the studio and let him see her. She did so. The sight of mother and child,

both pathetically beautiful in their loneliness, instantly caught the artist's eye and inspired him as a fine subject for a great painting. He asked her to pose with her child, and she consented. For two months he worked, and finally produced the famous painting entitled 'Alone in the World.' It represented a mother and child dressed in tatters, standing in a deserted doorway, while the snow is coming down in heavy flakes. The canvas proved a success; it was exhibited here and abroad, where it finally sold for a large sum. It made the artist famous, and in the generosity of his heart he persuaded his model to accept a financial present as a mark of his esteem and appreciation. A theatrical manager who had greatly admired the painting, prevailed upon the artist to reveal the identity of the model; this the artist finally did. The manager at once made her an offer to play an emotional part in a great realistic drama, at a large salary. She gladly accepted. Though new to the stage and by no means an actress, her great beauty, her magnetic presence and, above all, the genuine pathos in her sweet face, made an instantaneous success.

To-day she is famous, as we all know, and her little girl bids fair to follow in her mother's footsteps."

At that moment a loud snort interrupted Chauncey's story, and turning around he and Bob beheld Lord Brighton sound asleep; for, true to his aversion for women and everything concerning them, Chauncey's tale, together with the heat of the room, had made him sleepy. Seizing a seltzer-water bottle, Bob gently sprayed the sleeping lord's face for a moment. With a start the latter awoke. "By Jove, gentlemen, you must excuse me, dontcherknow! My eyes were paining me a bit, so I closed them for repairs; but I heard every word you said, Chauncey, and I heartily coincide with both of you in your opinion regarding the coal strike. The conduct of these mine owners is positively scandalous—positively scandalous."

A loud laugh from both Chauncey and Bob interrupted him.

"Oh, yes, you heard every word I said! Of course you did," added Chauncey with a wink at Bob. "Oh, how your eyes must have pained you! By the way, my lord, what was that explosion we

heard a while ago? Sounded like a trumpet. Ah, come, come, my lord, you've had a charming little nap."

"Yes," added Bob, "and I think we'll all follow suit by retiring at once, unless we want to eat breakfast here. So let's be off."

Lord Brighton, still half asleep, and looking somewhat sheepish at having been caught red-handed, nodded assent, and the three men—after promising to meet the following week at the Pennybaker ball—sought their respective hotels and retired.

CHAPTER II

COUNTESS IVANOVITCH

A WEEK later and the winter season is in full blast. The fiery enthusiasts, better known as the smart set, rush with restless feverishness to the luncheons, tea-parties, dinners and balls that form the order of the day, and in their frantic zeal painfully remind one at times of the diminutive size of the madhouse and the limited space to shelter the overflow.

The palatial Pennybaker mansion, on one of the most aristocratic thoroughfares, near upper Fifth Avenue, is a maze of brilliancy and splendor. The driveways leading to the various entrances are lined with magnificent palms, shrubberies and tropical flowers. The vestibules, salons and banquet hall are likewise garnished with rare and expensive floral decorations. From the gallery above, the ball-room presents a picture that is a veritable triumph of decorative art. The caterer has accomplished

marvels with which to tickle the artistocratic palates of the many guests invited; for to-day the beautiful young daughter of Philip Pennybaker, multi-millionaire and banker, will make her *debut* into society—society, wherein we all form a link, wherein we all have duties to perform and rights to claim, and which is governed by the sovereign will of the majority. Miss Pennybaker has been reared with the greatest care; she has had every advantage that money can buy or influence provide. Her education was obtained at a private institution of learning, whose methods were radically different from some of the degenerate tendencies so frequently met with nowadays at the fashionable seminaries and young ladies' institutes for the rich, where girls learn everything they shouldn't know and very little they ought to know. In the case of Miss Pennybaker, no pains had been spared to make her a representative type of lofty American womanhood. Thus the Moloch of society—poor, worn-out, half-grazed, satiated society—this night was looking forward with eager interest to the delivery unto its arms of a fresh new flower, whose tender

petals had as yet never been touched by the sirocco of social corruption, who knew naught of the social evils, amid which morality struggles with immorality, honesty with dishonesty, perfidy with uprightness, truthfulness with intrigue. Already speculations were rife among the several social leaders as to which one of them would be permitted to take the tender flower under her wing, protectorate or chaperonage; for Miss Pennybaker's mother had died years ago. Again calculations were afloat as to whom she might marry—or whether one of the rich social *roues* might not carry off the prize, and, incidentally, a slice of the Pennybaker millions. These were some of the thoughts fermenting behind the expensive bodices of the aristocratic guests who now began rolling up to the Pennybaker mansion, where they were met by Miss Hodge, who for years had discharged the honors of the house at the banker's home in the capacity of manager, and who was universally esteemed by the society leaders for her manifold abilities as an entertainer, originator of new diversions and gracious hostess. At nine o'clock the guests had nearly all arrived. Among

them were our friends, Lord Brighton, Bob Armstrong and Chauncey Lamont; all three of whom were ever welcome guests at all social functions, or wherever mammas with marriageable daughters frequented. At this hour the banquet hall was a scene of splendor. The superb toilets of the women presented an ever-changing panorama of color-harmony, while from an adjoining chamber a noted orchestra, secured for the occasion, dispensed classic music.

Bob and Chauncey, who were exceedingly popular with both men and women of their set, soon were surrounded by many friends, while Lord Brighton, circumnavigating the younger crowd of men, had quickly located acquaintances more suitable to his peculiar English tastes. He was soon conversing with an old London chum near the door of the banquet hall. At that same moment there was a commotion at the entrance; the door was flung open and the usher announced, "The Countess Ivanovitch, Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch."

Instantly there was a hush among the assembled guests, for the Countess and her brother were guests

of honor at the mansion that night; their coming had been looked forward to with great interest, for rumor told how they had been lionized at all the great capitals of Europe and likewise in this country. This much is certain, when the Countess upon entering the ball-room paused for a fraction of a moment on the threshold, there arose a murmur of admiration, and many a handsome woman among this brilliant throng turned just a suspicion paler with silent but uncontrollable envy. As the Countess, attended by her distinguished looking brother, slowly advanced, she was met half way, and with every mark of distinction, by the hostess. Nevertheless, while it was evident that Countess Ivanovitch was quite accustomed to the marked homage paid her, it was equally plain that the admiration accompanying it was by no means wholly due to her exalted social position, but rather to her extraordinarily charming personality.

Countess Ivanovitch was a young woman who must attract attention anywhere and under all circumstances by reason of her beauty. She was about five feet six inches tall, and decidedly patrician in

appearance. Her walk had that elasticity and fawn-like softness of step that distinguishes the children of the forest and is so unusual among latter-day society. Her age might range from twenty-one to twenty-three, and her form was of Junoesque proportions. Her costume, of exquisite simplicity, consisted of a glove-tight-fitting princess gown, made of the finest black silk-velvet and cut rather low. Trimmings there were none except a hand-painted garland of American beauties; these, gradually increasing in size, encircled the waist, and crossing in front ran down to the hem of the skirt, where they formed a unique and ultra-artistic border. A real American beauty rose adorned her abundant light-blonde hair, the heavy braids of which were most becomingly arranged upon the apex of her charming head, forming a striking contrast with her black gown. As to her face, it is difficult to make words do justice to its beauty. Her brow was lofty and smooth, and just high enough to appear intellectual. Her eyebrows, in charming contrast with her hair, were black, finely drawn and arched beyond the power of brush or

pen to portray—eyebrows which, if lovers wrote sonnets to those of their lady-loves, might have inspired the making of much verse.

Her eyes were limpid, large, of a brown so deep as to seem almost black, and were shaded by long, silky lashes. They were eyes, once seen, were never forgotten—lustrous, wonderful eyes! Her nose was of that rare Roman type seen in antique statuary and famous paintings, but seldom in life. Her mouth was lovely, and in strict accordance with the canons of true art. When she smiled, and its pretty corners curved upward, displaying a double row of pearly teeth, it was irresistibly inviting. Her lips were deep red and ever moist—a perpetual suggestion of a lingering kiss.

The contour of her face was oval, slightly tapering down to an exquisitely chiseled chin that was in exact proportion, with just a suspicion of firmness. The cheeks rounded without disturbing the oval lines, and were the abode of a pair of dimples that grew deeper as she laughed and lent to her face a bewitching and evanescent charm. The whiteness of her brow was enhanced by cheeks which sug-

gested the warm glow of the sunset with the delicacy of the rose. Her neck, a pillar of snowy whiteness, supported a well poised head, which she carried with regal grace. Her finely-moulded bust was sufficiently though not immodestly displayed by her low corsage—to conceal this potent charm of her piquant personality would have been a crime. Her perfectly fitted gown was fastened over the shoulders—merely as a matter of form—by a narrow velvet ribbon, which emphasized the dazzling whiteness of her lovely, dimpled shoulders and arms, which were partly covered with well-fitting white gloves, that reached above the elbows.

But the Countess's all-conquering charm lay in her eyes. There was a warm and melting look in these big brown eyes that held you there as long as you were wanted. There was no shyness in those orbs, but simply a frank confidence that went straight to your heart. Her conversation, without laying claim to great brilliancy, was of that sweet human quality that charms and delights. She possessed to a remarkable degree the power to convey to those with whom she spoke the belief

that their interests were her own to the exclusion of all else. It is but simple truth to state that few men had been able to resist this bewitching, voluptuous woman. They were her slaves one and all; and, although she appeared totally unaware of this, it did not lessen the secret enmity felt toward her by many of her own sex. From the moment of her entrance into the ball-room to-night she became the acknowledged queen of the occasion, the storm-centre of attraction for men and women alike—the one sex because of genuine admiration, the other against their wishes and only because of social etiquette.

Scarcely less attractive in personality was her brother Nicholas, whose eyes seemed loath to ever withdraw wholly from his sister. Baron Nicholas was tall, athletic, exceedingly well made and of military bearing. He was decidedly *distingué* in appearance. His hair, eyes and mustache were black, his nose clear cut and rather of the Greek type. His brow was lofty, denoting a powerful intellect. He was a linguist, a traveller, a man of the world, and his manners were perfect.

'Twas said that they belonged to one of the wealthiest families of the nobility in Russia; even connected, in a direct line, with the imperial family. Their manners and bearing, certainly, seemed to support this statement. To those fortunate enough to become more intimately acquainted with Nicholas and his charming sister, the former, in a devil-may-care fashion, confided the fact that he had left, or, rather, was invited out of Russia, because of a youthful escapade, which had brought his father's wrath and great displeasure down upon his head, causing him to quit St. Petersburg somewhat hastily and come to America until the affair had blown over. His father, Duke Stanislaus Nicholas Ivanovitch, was so greatly angered at what he called his only son's disgraceful conduct that he had also cut off his large allowance, so that for a time Nicholas found himself obliged to put up with modest surroundings and, in short, was in sore straits. It was then that his favorite sister, Ravenna, Countess Ivanovitch, to whom he had confided his troubles, came bravely to his rescue, and in turn reported his difficulties to a very wealthy

aunt, who simply adored the dear, impetuous boy. Despite his youthful follies she at once came to his aid, with both advice and the remittances of a large sum of money. But more than this; in order to keep her beloved nephew out of further mischief in America, she had prevailed upon Ravenna to join her brother here until matters at home were adjusted, when both could again return to Russia together. Meanwhile the dear aunt would assume the responsibility of effecting a reconciliation with Nicholas's father. Countess Ivanovitch had but recently joined her brother in New York, where she added her own large private income to the dear aunt's regular remittances to pay expenses. Incidentally, and after considerable persuasion, they had consented to show many interesting photographs and engravings representing the celebrated Ivanovitch castles, country seats and estates in Russia, which the New York papers begged permission to publish, and which were subsequently exhibited at the various art stores on Fifth Avenue, together with portraits of some of the royal connections of the famous Ivanovitch family. Nich-

olas and his sister entertained lavishly; and society, ever eager for new diversions, instantly made the most of the noble pair. Thus within an incredibly short time they became the fad and fashion of the smart set. Indeed, such was the social prestige of the two that Fifth Avenue modistes were soon asking permission to turn out hats and robes *a la Ivanovitch.*

When the Countess and her brother entered the salon Lord Brighton was standing near the door, among a group of friends, amid whom was Chauncey. The latter had purposely kept close to his lordship so as to note the impression the Countess would make upon his invulnerable English heart. Lord Brighton started as his gaze fell upon the fair Russian, during the moment she had so gracefully poised upon the threshold of the salon before entering, and while her beautiful face and figure were displayed to the greatest possible advantage within the flower-covered frame of the large folding door. Lord Brighton stopped short in the middle of one of his favorite sentences, and, without being conscious of the fact, stepped forward,

while adjusting his monocle, so as to get a better view of the beautiful vision. His lips quivered, then slightly parted, as if to utter an exclamation of surprise; but instead they remained open in silent, speechless wonderment. But though his lordship never uttered a word, it was evident, from his sudden pallor, that he had suffered an unusual emotion—one, indeed, which had driven all the blood to his heart. Stepping still nearer toward the door, he finally exclaimed, as if to himself, and in a voice trembling with emotion, "I say, wonderful! Positively charming! Can't be denied, dontcherknow." He was rudely aroused from his ecstasy by Chauncey, who took a hold of his arm. "Well, my lord, you seem quite interested in the lady. Isn't she a beauty?"

"Quite so, quite so! Can't deny it, you know"—half averting his eyes in the endeavor to hide from Chauncey the great admiration he had conceived for the beautiful Countess, in spite of himself and all his resolutions against being impressed.

"Come, I'll introduce you to her brother Nicholas, Brighton. He is a splendid fellow, who, in

turn, will introduce you to his beautiful sister." And taking Lord Brighton's arm Chauncey led him over to a group of gentlemen who were shaking hands with Nicholas. The Baron saw them coming and stepped forward to meet them. Nicholas, who had known Chauncey Lamont ever since his arrival in New York, greeted him cordially, and Chauncey introduced his friend. "Baron, this is Lord Oliver Brighton, of London, England, an old friend of mine. Lord Brighton, this is Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch of St. Petersburgh."

"Glad to meet you, Baron; very glad indeed, dontcherknow." The two men shook hands and bowed.

"You will find Lord Brighton an interesting conversationalist," continued Chauncey to Nicholas. "He's been all over the world and always has a fine collection of new stories."

"Glad to know it, to be sure," replied Nicholas. "If there is any one I like to meet it is a man who has travelled, for I've travelled a great deal myself."

At that moment Chauncey started and blushed. "You'll pardon me, gentlemen, for a little while,

won't you? I see a lady over there whom I must go and speak to," and without awaiting their polite retort he hurried away and was soon deeply engrossed with the lady he had designated, who, in turn, seemed delighted to see him. There was a cynical smile hidden in Nicholas's jet black mustache, but it vanished in a second. The next moment he was all suavity, all smiles again. "No doubt this lady is very dear to Mr. Lamont's heart," he said somewhat sarcastically. "We men don't blush and feel embarrassed with ladies unless they preoccupy our hearts."

"Just so, just so, Baron," politely affirmed Lord Brighton. "Shouldn't wonder if Chauncey is interested in that quarter. He is a splendid fellow, though, dontcherknow."

"You are right, Lord Brighton, and I love him dearly; in fact, we have been friends since we first met. But, by the way, I want your lordship to meet my sister. Let us walk over and I will introduce you," and taking Lord Brighton's arm in a friendly manner they sauntered over toward the crowd of admirers surrounding the Countess.

There was something in this young nobleman which in any one else would have been termed aggressive, but which in him, with his fine presence and distinguished manners, simply added weight to his magnetic personality.

When they had neared the group surrounding his sister, Nicholas excused himself for a moment from Lord Brighton while he asked her to be introduced. He stepped up to her, and with an affectionate smile murmured a few words in an undertone. She nodded, slipped her arm in his and accompanied him to where Lord Brighton stood.

"Ravenna, dear!" said Nicholas, "this is Lord Oliver Brighton, of London, England. Lord Brighton, permit me to introduce you to my sister, Ravenna, Countess Ivanovitch."

Brighton bowed very low. "Countess, I am more than delighted to meet you. Surely I shall deem it an honor to be among your friends, and shall endeavor to be worthy of it."

"The pleasure is mine, Lord Brighton," she returned with a bewitching smile, and a look so full of intensity and feeling that it went straight to

his heart, while her warm little hand touched his for a moment. There was a suspicion of sarcasm about the corners of Nicholas's mouth as he excused himself in order to meet some ladies just then passing. Meanwhile Lord Brighton—who, for the first time in his life had really been interested in any woman—gallantly offered the Countess his arm and escorted her to the banquet hall, where he attended her throughout the supper, to the chagrin of a score of other and younger men. During supper champagne flowed freely, and many a clever toast was drunk to Miss Pennybaker's success and social future. Opposite Lord Brighton and Ravenna were seated Chauncey and the young lady for whom he had so abruptly left them in the ballroom. The pair seemed so deeply engrossed in each other as to be almost oblivious of their surroundings. Lord Brighton made use of the opportunity, and said to the Countess in a low voice:

"Ah, my dear Countess, just look how those two young people are wrapt up in each other! Charming, don't you know. Wonder who the young lady is?"

"My dear Lord Brighton," she returned, "they are a charming couple. I believe the young lady is Miss Beatrice Cameron, daughter of General Cameron, a man of national renown. Don't you think she is pretty?"

"I might think so did not every one sink into insignificance in presence of the Countess Ivanovitch," was his prompt rejoinder.

"Oh, you flatter me. I am afraid you are like all other men, who feed us on flattery, by which, after all, they mean nothing."

"Ah, Countess, pray do not class me with the average. I mean every word I say, and no other woman has ever heard one word of flattery from me. I couldn't do it, you know. But—" He was about to continue, when the conversation around them became too general, and he was forced to defer his personal remarks until a more suitable occasion.

Meanwhile Chauncey, despite his blushes and embarrassment on seeing Miss Cameron, managed to continue paying assiduous court to that young lady.

It has been already stated that Chauncey's only

ostensible occupation seemed to consist in his effort to spend his father's money faster than the latter could earn it. But this statement needs amendment. It must in truth be added of Chauncey that while he was quite a spendthrift, and fond of life in all its phases, it could not be said of him that he was either immoral or addicted to any ugly vices. Quite the contrary. He had an exceedingly kind heart and an ample purse, and the latter was continually levied upon by his impecunious friends. He was simply a boy with too much money. He had always been given whatever he desired, and hence had fallen into the habit of thinking there was nothing beyond his reach. He was well educated, very shrewd in business matters, and absolutely truthful and loyal to his friends. There was an exclamation of genuine pleasure from both Miss Cameron and he as they met. Chauncey warmly grasped the young girl's hands. "I am so glad that you have come, Beatrice; I've been looking for you everywhere. How are you?"

"I am well, and so happy to see you, Chauncey," warmly replied Beatrice; "although," she added

quickly, "I ought to be really angry with you for not keeping your promise about that sleigh ride we were going to take," and she tried to pucker up her little mouth into a pout.

"Oh, don't be angry," laughed Chauncey good-naturedly. "Besides, I confess my guilt; and if it were not for these people, and the fear of their believing me mentally shipwrecked, I would bow low and humbly beg your pardon for not having more snow on the ground—my only excuse, I assure you, for not keeping my promise. But if you must and will have more snow you shall have it, if I have to go to see Old Jupiter myself. I swear it by the beard of my father."

"Why, Chauncey, your father has no beard!"

"Oh, that's so. Well?"

"Ah, you'll manage to circumnavigate the point," she laughingly said. "But, tell me, Chauncey, what have you been doing with yourself since I last saw you?"

"Oh, I've been really busy with my new duties, for, you know, I've been selected corresponding secretary of the New York Society for the intro-

duction of classic literature among the negroes in South Africa, and, besides, I did a lot of things socially, sweetheart. Forgive me, Beatrice," he added, seeing the young girl blushing violently at this familiarity. "You know we are sweethearts; and I hope, Beatrice, that we will always be sweethearts," and again taking the young girl's hand he looked earnestly into her upturned face as they silently walked toward one of the little conservatories adjoining the ball-room, where they seated themselves upon a divan in a secluded corner beneath the overhanging verdure of orchids and palms.

"Yes, Chauncey," she softly replied; and falteringly added: "if you wish to call me sweetheart, why—why—" Here she again blushed, bowed her head in confusion and blurted out, "why—you may." There was profound sincerity and feeling in the young girl's voice as she confidingly placed her hand in his.

Chauncey was deeply touched, for though Beatrice had been his first and truest friend in his college days and always possessed his heart, he was

unaware that his love was so fully reciprocated, and that the years that had passed since then had only strengthened their affection.

Beatrice Cameron was one of those sweet-faced girls with large, soulful blue eyes, dimpled cheeks, plenty of hair and, apparently, a splendid form. She was the daughter of General Beauregard Cameron, a famous old soldier. She had spent the greater part of her childhood and girlhood in boarding schools. In ealiest years she had been a schoolmate and comrade of Chauncey, who then was wont to carry her books, help her with her lessons and was her dutiful cavalier upon all occasions. Quite naturally, an innocent but lasting friendship had grown and bound these two young hearts together, which friendship, as the years passed on, ripened gradually into a more tender affection. Chauncey fondly lifted the girl's face to his and pressed a kiss upon her lips. Language became superfluous between these two, and they remained silent for a few moments. Then Chauncey said caressingly, " Beatrice, dear, when may I call you all my own? You know, sweetheart, all lovers are

impatient, and I—I—well, I'm awfully impatient," he added with a smile.

She sweetly replied, with a gentle tap of her fan, " I have promised father to wait until I am twenty-three, and I love papa too much to grieve him by disobeying. But come, dear, let us return to the ball-room, or else our continued absence may cause unpleasant comment."

" You are right," replied Chauncey, getting up; " and I should have had better sense than to keep you here so long. Let us return at once."

They had hardly left the little conservatory when the palms in front of which they had been sitting parted and Nicholas stepped out. Ordinarily a handsome man, there was at this particular moment something decidedly base in Nicholas's finely-cut features, and a cruel, sarcastic smile lurked about his thin lips. He brushed his coat, then took a silver cigarette case from his pocket, lighted a cigarette and sitting upon the divan which the two young lovers had just left he began to smoke and soliloquize.

"Love! Bah, what bosh! As if there was such a thing as love. Ha, ha, ha! What fools, with their billing and cooing! But, nevertheless, they are going to marry! Will they? No, by heaven they shall not! Not while little Nicholas needs her money; for she has money, this mild-eyed, mushy little dove; I'll ruin this little game, no matter at what cost. She must be mine. Not a moment longer wasted, by the way, until I have her money. That is all I want, for I hate such weak, silly girls, without strength of character or a will of their own; girls who are swayed like a reed in the wind. Give me the dashing girl, with fire and spunk; the girl that fights, the girls that says d—— when she thinks it, and drinks a cocktail when she wants it! That's the sort of a girl that can put her clothes in my trunk any day." He suddenly jumped up and listened. "Somebody's coming I believe." Quickly he dropped his cigarette and put his foot on it to smother the burning end, then pulling his handkerchief from his pocket he made a few passes to get rid of the smoke, and had barely time to disappear in his hiding place behind

the palms when Lord Brighton and Countess Ivanovitch entered the little conservatory.

The Countess, apparently unmindful of the comment her action might have caused, had given Lord Brighton a number of dances, to that gentleman's great delight. Bob and Chauncey looked on, amazed at the remarkable metamorphosis their English friend was undergoing since his eyes first lighted on the Russian beauty. Countess Ivanovitch was an exquisite dancer; the rhythmic movements of her undulating form as she abandoned herself with fawn-like grace in Lord Brighton's arms and followed the harmonious strains of the music, now soft and enchanting, then fast and furious, had been the cynosure of all eyes. She seemed to electrify the erstwhile British stoic and bring him back to his youth. There was a marked contrast between the two as they entered the conservatory for a much needed rest. Lord Brighton was flushed with excitement. His eyes seemed to sparkle with life and activity, his hands trembled with emotion as he led the fair woman to the divan, which had served a scene so vastly different in

character within the hour. The Countess on the contrary, though somewhat fatigued and out of breath from dancing, seemed otherwise perfectly cool and collected. Upon her lovely face there still lingered the flush caused by the rapid motion of the waltz. Her beautiful bosom rose and fell with tantalizing buoyancy. In her hand she held a small gold bound card with a diminutive jewelled pencil suspended by a chain of the same material. Her lustrous eyes had a look of voluptuous ease, as though she welcomed this little *tête-à-tête* more as an opportunity to sit down than anything else.

"Oh, I am so glad to sit down, Lord Brighton," she began. "Aren't you?"

"Why, certainly, my dear Countess, if only because it affords me the great pleasure of being for a few moments alone with you."

"Please don't! I have told you I detest flattery."

"I beg you a thousand and one pardons, Countess; I shall endeavor to correct the fault I possess with the rest of mankind—that of flattering those we admire."

Ravenna laughed at this queer attempt on the Englishman's part to excuse flattery by flattery. "You are making matters worse instead of better, Lord Brighton."

"Please pardon me this once, won't you? And I beg you to correct me in whatever you find defective in me. I shall consider it a special favor to be corrected by so charming— Oh, oh, oh, I beg your pardon."

"You are incorrigible, you see," she observed, with a look of amused indulgence that caused Lord Brighton to pale with emotion.

"May I bring you some refreshment? You must be thirsty."

"Thank you, I shall take a glass of lemon-ice."

"With pleasure, Countess," and he started off to serve her.

"This is delicious after the exertions of the evening," observed Ravenna, as her pink digits lifted the glass to her rosy lips, "and very refreshing."

"So it is," he added. "May I inquire how you enjoyed the dancing?"

"Very much indeed, thank you. I am passionately fond of it, and could continue indefinitely. But how about yourself?"

"Don't ask me, Countess. I can't account for it at all. I am quite a stranger to myself this evening, I assure you. Didn't know it could be done, dontcherknow. Haven't waltzed in five years. But your dancing was so divine and infectious that I couldn't help it, dontcherknow." He said this as he slowly sipped his lemon-ice.

And it was true. Lord Brighton had not danced in years, and had believed himself unable to do a single step. But when he felt this charming, palpitating woman leaning upon his arm, inhaled the perfumé-laden intensity of her intoxicating being, and met the burning gaze of her laughing, pleasure-seeking eyes as the music struck up the famous Strauss waltz, and the slender waist his arm encircled began to sway back and forth to the melodious strains, he was irresistibly engulfed in the vortex of harmony and motion, and to his surprise danced admirably.

"At any rate I enjoyed myself immensely. Per-

mit me," he added, seeing that Ravenna looked somewhat warm, and he began fanning her.

"Oh, thank you, Lord Brighton," she returned, evidently delighted, and in her element amidst this assiduity of her admirer. "You are exceedingly kind, and seem to divine my every wish. These many lights are very heating. Let us return to the ball-room, or else our prolonged absence may cause unpleasant remarks."

"With pleasure, madame," he replied with polite gravity. "But ere we return may I ask you to accord me the great pleasure of visiting you at your home?" and he accompanied these words with a gesture of profound entreaty.

Countess Ivanovitch evinced a distinct pleasure at this question, and it was with real sincerity she said, "I shall be pleased to receive you at my home, Lord Brighton."

He bowed low, in silence offered her his arm and together they returned to the ball-room.

A moment later her brother Nicholas stepped from his hiding place behind the palms and hastened after her.

While Beatrice and Chauncey had been exchanging confidences in the little conservatory a very different discussion was taking place in a nook opposite, on the other side of the ball-room, which formed the centre of the Pennybaker mansion. Here love and sentiment were out of the question, for the little room was occupied by four young married women, who as the evening wore on had found this cosy retreat, where, secure from the tiresome platitudes of the bald-headed gentlemen in evening clothes, they were enjoying a quiet cup of tea all by themselves and a confidential chat about their absent friends. What more could be desired from these ladies' present standpoint? They were talking dress and picking Countess Ivanovitch into small silken shreds.

"Oh, dear me, yes!" spoke Mrs. Lydia Fairbanks, wife of a soap manufacturer who had cleaned up millions. "You don't mean to tell me, Mrs. Drayton, that those hips are all hers? Why, it couldn't be, they are too perfect. Nature never made a woman so perfect. Any way, I'll never believe it. Do you, Mrs. Norton?"

"Of course not," promptly replied Mrs. Norton, wife of a self-made man of great wealth, who had started by selling axle grease, put up in small tin boxes, as the greatest corn-salve on earth, and was never found out.

"I think she wears the new rubber hips that are all the rage now. You inflate them as you would an air-cushion and tie them around your waist, and you can't really tell them from the real."

"Oh, how perfectly dreadful! I wouldn't wear those things for all the world. I wouldn't care how unshapely I was," exclaimed Mrs. Varick.

"Nor would I," chimed in Mrs. Fairbanks.

"Well, it's a good thing we don't need them," observed Mrs. Norton. "But did you see that dress she wore? Well, of all the ugly styles I ever saw that dress is certainly the worst. The very idea of having hand-painted American beauty roses on a black velvet princess gown! Well, well, it's preposterous! She only does it to attract attention."

"But, Mrs. Norton, didn't I hear you tell her it was the loveliest gown you ever saw; such a love

of a dress that you would order one next week, with her permission?" observed Mrs. Drayton.

"Oh, well, you know, Mrs. Drayton, you have to say those things to keep on the sugared side of people."

"Certainly you do," supplemented Mrs. Fairbanks. "What would become of society if people dared speak the truth?"

"There wouldn't be any," cynically remarked Mrs. Varick, as she lifted a cup of tea to her aristocatic lips, while taking great care that her friends could see the magnificent new pearl worn upon her little finger. You may all think what you please, but I don't like the Countess. To a very discerning observer she is not a pretty woman. Of course, she carries her head prettily, but heavens above, she needn't think she is the only one. By the way, Mrs. Norton, don't you think her hair looks bleached and her complexion fatigued, as the French say? I never saw such blonde hair as hers that wasn't bleached. Did you?"

"Oh, you needn't think anything about it, ladies," broke in Mrs. Fairbanks. "I *know* it is.

My maid told me so; she ought to know, for she helped her rearrange her hair in the boudoir, and she says it was darker at the roots."

"I thought so," coincided Mrs. Varick, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders. "I tell you, I don't believe in people doing these vulgar things just to attract attention. It is very coarse."

"Yes, and all that studied simplicity in her dress. It's altogether too severe to be natural. It's all done for effect," opined Mrs. Drayton, as she declined some more tea.

"Do you know, I wonder if she is really a Countess?" here interrupted Mrs. Norton.

"Oh, mercy, yes!" rejoined Mrs. Fairbanks. "She is a Countess, certainly. My husband knows all about them, besides the papers published long articles about their Russian estates and their family. He thinks she's lovely, and says she's the finest-looking woman he has seen for years. But then I have only a limited confidence in my husband's judgment."

"My husband thinks the same," broke in Mrs. Varick.

"And so does mine," exclaimed Mrs. Drayton. "But that's just like men, their capacity for taking rose-colored views doesn't amount to much; every new face they see is the loveliest. And did you see, ladies, how they all crowded around her and almost fought for an introduction? Especially Lord Brighton; why, he acted perfectly foolish from the moment he saw her, and just couldn't keep away."

"Yes, and did you see, Mrs. Drayton, how nicely she treated him, and danced with him almost exclusively?"

"Yes, and everybody was talking about it," observed Mrs. Varick. "Perhaps she is after his millions; but if she is, she's wasting her time, for that old Englishman won't marry anybody."

"Somebody told me," explained Mrs. Fairbanks, "that he was after that silly little goose of a Pennybaker girl, but I don't believe it. Any way, if he gets her he will have to keep her in the city, for in the country I am sure the cows would nibble on her."

A general laugh followed this little joke of Mrs.

Fairbanks at the expense of the young girl whose *debut* into society they had come to celebrate.

"No, no, dear," rejoined Mrs. Norton, "she'll never marry anybody unless it is Mr. Armstrong, and I believe he likes her very well, for he is just the sort of man that fancies these angelic little feminine Dresden dolls."

Here their little chat was interrupted by the music which began to play in the ball-room. So the four ladies rejoined the other guests.

CHAPTER III

OLD FOES

AND how did Bob Armstrong occupy his time that evening at the Pennybaker mansion? The fact that Chauncey did not introduce both Lord Brighton and Bob together to the Countess, as they had agreed upon doing, was due to Bob Armstrong, who, for some unknown reason, had asked Chauncey, at the last moment to defer his introduction to the Countess until he might request it. Thus, when the Countess approached, Bob was standing directly facing the door, and as she and Nicholas stepped into the brilliantly lighted ball-room, the eyes of the two men met. The effect was startling, though it was visible only for the fraction of a second. At sight of Nicholas, Bob turned pale as death, while his brows knitted as if he was trying to recall the face of the young Russian before him. As to Nicholas, if he had ever seen Bob Armstrong

before in his life and had recognized him, the fact was not apparent. He merely gave an involuntary little start and tightly closed his lips; the next moment his face was as impenetrable as that of a sphinx. Bob never moved until Chauncey had introduced Lord Brighton, then he hastened to a smoking-room located at the further end of the vast banquet hall, where, after assuring himself that he was quite alone, he took from the inner pocket of his waistcoat a wallet containing some papers; they were yellow with age and much torn. Sitting down upon a divan in a secluded corner he picked out one particular envelope somewhat larger in size than the others, from which he extracted a small photograph. Then, returning the other letters to their hiding place, he leaned back in the divan and gazed long and earnestly at the picture. "Strange, very strange indeed," ran his thoughts. "Can it be possible? That man's face is wonderfully familiar to me. His height, the build, the bearing, all are the same; and yet it can't possibly be, for I saw him myself at Sing Sing, a convict. I must be mistaken. It can't be. Never-

theless, I won't rest until I get at the bottom of this marvellous resemblance. And if—if it should prove true. If my strange hallucination should be correct, then indeed fate has favored me. Let me see, how many years is it now?" and dropping the photograph in his lap he began counting the years. "Yes, just ten years ago next Sunday; ten long years. Will I ever forget that Sunday night? How things have changed since then!" He sighed deeply, as if the sight of the miniature he had so earnestly contemplated had awakened bitter recollections. Again he gazed at it, then putting it back in the envelope he replaced the wallet in his pocket. From this moment on he became Bob Armstrong the detective. Slowly he walked back and mingled with the guests, who now had nearly all arrived. When he reached the ballroom he looked around as though in quest of some one, and seeing Chauncey Lamont in the near distance, he resolutely walked up to him and said: "Old boy, I wish you would take me over to Ivanovitch and give me an introduction. I am ready for it now."

"Why didn't you let me introduce you a while ago?" asked Chauncey with some astonishment.

"Well, I really don't know myself. It was just a queer notion of mine. You have always been a loyal friend to me, and I have full confidence in you, yet there are reasons, weighty reasons, which prevent my explaining this thing to you just now. But I promise you that I will tell you later."

"Well, all right; but you surely have got me guessing. There's something behind all this, old man, if I know you aright," he added, somewhat curiously.

"There is," said Bob simply, and then he continued: "Any way, Chauncey, I want an introduction now, and want it badly."

"All right," obligingly replied Chauncey again. "Come on." And taking his friend by the arm they walked over to where Nicholas was chatting with some people."

"Baron Ivanovitch," said Chauncey, "let me introduce you to my friend, and one of the best fellows that ever wrote a check. Bob, allow me. Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch of St. Petersburg."

They shook hands and bowed. Then they looked up, and for the second time that evening their eyes met. Neither flinched, only Nicholas seemed to grow an inch taller and drew himself up to his full height, as he faced Bob, and a close observer might have discerned a look of fierce defiance mingled with hatred in his black eyes. As for Bob, his face bore that look of quiet self-possession and ease that characterizes the mental giant, the careful general and strategist, the man who maps out his plans and carries them out with mathematical accuracy. As these two men faced each other beneath the dazzling lights of the ball-room, it could be felt, despite their perfect manners and the politeness of their greeting, that two mortal foes had met, and a battle to the very death for mastery was on between them. After they had thus mentally measured each other, Nicholas was the first to speak. "I am delighted to meet you, Mr. Armstrong, I am sure," he said dramatically, with just the slightest suspicion of sarcasm.

"And I am pleased to meet you," said Bob, and the acquaintance was consummated. From that

moment on Bob Armstrong never let his eyes stray far from the young *nobleman*, who, apparently, had not the slightest suspicion that he was being watched by this new acquaintance. If he was aware of the profound interest he had inspired he certainly gave Bob not the slightest opportunity to confirm his suspicion. After they had for some minutes chatted upon topics of general interest, Bob inquired, "I suppose this is your first visit to this country, Baron?"

"Yes, my very first," the latter replied, with an emphasis upon the very, "and I must say," he added, "I am simply delighted; charmed with this country and its people. I wish I could live here for ever; but of course that is altogether out of the question; at least I couldn't think of it while my father is living."

"Well," rejoined Bob, "I certainly must compliment you upon your perfect English, Baron Ivanovitch. 'Tis rather unusual for a foreigner to so completely master the language."

It was evident Bob did not believe the Baron's statement that this was his first visit to America.

"No, there is nothing unusual in my English, Mr. Armstrong. We Russians have splendid schools and universities. Our English teachers are mostly native Americans. Besides, all Russians of the better class have decided linguistic talents. Now my sister, for instance, though considerably younger than I, has a far better command of the English than I have. By the way," he suddenly added, as if glad of the opportunity to change the subject, "would you like to meet her? She is a charming girl, and one of the best sisters imaginable."

"I should be delighted, I am sure."

"Very well, come on," and Nicholas took Bob by the arm and led him to where his sister was surrounded by a circle of admirers.

"Ravenna," he said, "this is Mr. Armstrong, a new acquaintance of mine. Mr. Armstrong, allow me to introduce you to my sister."

"I am most happy to know you, Mr. Armstrong," graciously said the Countess with a charming smile. "Any one who is a friend of my brother is sure to be mine," and she held out her hand, which he shook cordially.

"Madame," replied Bob, with a profound bow, "I am pleased as well as surprised to find that Baron Ivanovitch has so charming a sister."

After a short conversation Bob left the Countess, whose whole attention was being absorbed by the assiduous and irrepressible Lord Brighton, and with Nicholas walked toward the banquet hall, where supper was being served. There Nicholas met other friends and left Bob. The latter on looking about gave a start of surprise and hastened toward a young woman who had just entered the hall from the other side. She saw him approach and held out both hands with undisguised pleasure.

"Why, how do you do, Bob? Haven't seen you since the Brooklyn Handicap."

"That's right, Fanny. How are you?" and Bob warmly shook the girl's hands. You look in capital condition," he said.

"Yes, and I am feeling well. Going out all the time. Say, Bob," she suddenly interrupted herself, "you haven't seen my new colt, have you? Oh, she's a peach! She will trot the rest of the

bunch to a standstill, I'll tell you that, Bob."

"Is that so? Where did you get her?"

"Oh, I swapped old Fleetfoot for her with a ten spot on the side. It was a bargain! I wouldn't take double for her now."

"You seem to be awfully gone on her, Fanny."

"Am I? Well, I should remark! But say, Bob, she has the prettiest feet you ever saw, and is built like a deer. Really, Bob, do you know, I think I can knock the little spots out of anything running this season."

"Well, how did you come out at the Brooklyn Handicap?"

"Great, Bob. I had a lead pipe cinch. Tod Callahan tipped me off on Salvable, and I didn't do a thing but cleaned up eight thousand. Why, 'twas just like finding money."

"Did you?"

"Didn't you pick up any money on Salvable?"

"Nothing to speak of, Fanny. I had no faith in him, and only put a few dollars on him for place."

The young girl who had greeted Bob in this familiar manner was Miss Fanny Chase, and, as the reader has probably discovered, she was a fair type of the modern sportive femininity known as "The Horsey Girl." Fanny was the only daughter of a millionaire horse owner and racing magnate. She was about twenty-four years of age, with a healthy, well-developed figure, a fine complexion, an attractive face and a big head full of hair. Her eyes were large, a dark gray and full of fire, mischief and fearlessness. She had grown up in the horsey atmosphere, and had ridden ponies ever since she was big enough to hold the reins, down at her father's big ranche in New Mexico; where the cowboys swore by Fanny Chase, who knew all there was to be known about the equine family in general. Being an expert horsewoman, a famous whip and an all round connoisseur, she had so continually associated with the race-horse fraternity that her manners, talk and even appearance were permeated therewith, so that it was next to impossible to imagine Fanny Chase otherwise than dressed in a riding-habit, tugged up in the back,

or, more frequently, in a short skirt, black derby and carrying a riding-whip. She was decidedly a unique character, and there was not a race-horse man of note or string owner in the country that was not directly or indirectly acquainted with her. It was said that even the horses knew her. Fanny was what you may call a jolly good comrade. She could drink a highball, smoke a cigarette when she wanted to, d—— when she thought it necessary, listen to a good story or tell one and talk horses from morning until night. And yet, despite those sporting proclivities, she was thoroughly good, and woe to the man who would dare insult her. Hence she was universally respected, and enjoyed the highest esteem of both young and old.

Bob and Fanny had been firm friends for a long time. They mutually admired each other's many sterling qualities in a perfectly harmless way, and were frequently riding, driving or attending the races together, in which both were more or less interested.

Without being consciously in love with Bob she

liked this right-minded moral man, whose life, despite his wealth, was an open book wherein no pages stuck together. He valued her good fellowship, and above all her kindness of heart; for Fanny behind her riding-habit carried a heart pure as steel, and many a poor wretched family prayed for the happiness and success of this strange, horsey girl, who would come along unexpectedly in her riding-suit, whip in hand, and spend whole afternoons with the ragged, hungry urchins of tenement districts, and on leaving slip a bill into the poor mother's hand, or send her a supply of fuel for the winter. Nor was her benevolence done for advertising purposes, as is, unfortunately, the case with many of our "best people" nowadays. No, Fanny was the true philanthropist. She was too sensible a girl to buy flowers for the poor or, worse still, donate whole libraries to people who needed food. Not at all; hers was real charity; it was done unostentatiously and thoroughly. She did good for the mere pleasure of doing good.

"Fanny," said Bob, "I may want to ask a great favor of you in the near future, and there isn't a

soul in the wide world that I would or could ask it from but you. Will you grant it, regardless of what it may be?" and he gave the young girl a look of such earnestness as plainly proclaimed she possessed his entire confidence.

"Why, of course, Bob. Need you ask? But look here, you seem so serious that I really believe you either want to propose to me or buy my filly." And she gave a laugh full of jolly merriment.

"Neither, Fanny," continued Bob, with a look that belied his words. "Besides, a gray old bachelor like me, on the shady side of thirty-five, would never suit a handsome young spitfire like you."

"Back to the paddock with those funeral airs, Bob. It's all nonsense. You are all right, and I wouldn't want you to be otherwise. Now, will you be good? But tell me, what do you want? Don't hesitate, for you know I am your friend, and you can have anything I've got—even my filly, if you really need it."

"Thank you," replied Bob, with a touch of emotion at the girl's kindness of heart. "What I want

to ask you is something far more difficult and important."

"No matter, I'll do it for you, depend upon it."

"Fanny," he continued, "let us meet at some private place and I will tell you. It must be a place where no one can overhear us. What do you say to my coming up to your house?"

"That's the very place, Bob. We'll go to my den, where no one can disturb us. It will be absolutely safe. Let me know when it shall be. Just ask the butler when you come to show you up. And say, I'll have some fine cigars, and cocktails, and highballs, and gin fizzes, and anything you want. Besides, you are going to look my filly over, aren't you?"

"Thank you, Fanny, I wouldn't miss it. I'll have to leave you now."

"Good-by, Bob. Be good to yourself. I am going over to give Miss Pennybaker my sympathy for having been projected into society. Poor girl! She doesn't know what she's got into." The two cordially shook hands. "Good-by," again she said.

Walking a few steps she suddenly turned and called after Bob, who by this time had nearly reached the door. "Oh, Bob. As you go down ask the butler to have my auto-know-better at the door in about fifteen minutes, will you, please? Here's my chauffeur's number," and she handed Bob a tiny check and walked off.

Miss Chase walked through the banquet hall, where she was stopped by friends at nearly every step, for she was a general favorite, even with her own sex, who admired in her, aside from her wealth, that which they lacked—namely, independence, broad-mindedness and individuality. Fanny did not stop long anywhere, however, but sought and found Miss Alma Pennybaker, the young debutante. The two had been friends since the latter's childhood, and Alma loved this frank, kind-hearted girl very dearly, for, "*les extremes se touches*," and these two girls were in every way radically different. They kissed each other as they met. Fanny without much ado put her arms about her young friend, and said:

"Alma, I came to tell you good-night, and, inci-

dentally, to give you a few words of good advice," saying which she kissed her again. "I have only a few moments to spare, for my 'mobe' is waiting downstairs. But come, Alma, let's walk over to the divan in the corner, where they can't hear us."

When the two girls had seated themselves, Alma said:

"Fanny, I can guess what you came to tell me, for amidst all this splendor and luxury, among all these so-called friends, there is none save you whom I would call friend."

"What I wanted to say to you is this, Alma. You have been entered to-day in the Society Race. It's an exclusive meeting, where nothing but horses with good backing can run. You've got the backing! Now then, Alma, Society represents a string of talent from all sorts of stables, some with pedigree, others without. Their past performances are a matter of record. But what I want to tell you is this: They are a swift bunch, and have backing enough to maintain a fast track. There are some very good horses among them, horses with a past, and there are others who had no past and never will

have a future; they are in it only because they have the backing, and will drop out of the race when their backing evaporates. One thing I want to say, dear, they are up to all sorts of tricks, and what they don't know isn't worth remembering. Their motto is 'Get there' at any cost. Of course, they don't advertise their methods on the Grand Stand, but when you are on to their little ways you can see what they are on the home stretch. Now then, Alma dear, among that bunch you are only a little filly, and little fiillies like you that are new and don't understand is what they are looking for. They will swarm around you like trainers around a new colt, tell you that you are a winner and will leave the rest of the string at the post, or come in a dozen lengths ahead on the home stretch. Now I just want to say to you, dear, that they simply want to get on to your style, so that they can mete it out to you when you least expect it, and make you think them your friends. Remember, Alma, your truest friend on earth is yourself, as long as you keep a patent leather finish on your self-respect, and keep your con-

science free from punctures, as a young filly like you should, you will have no trouble, and you will do honor to yourself and your trainers. Never permit yourself to grab the bit between your teeth and run away from yourself. Just listen to those that would have you do that in an absent-minded sort of way, and when they get through forget it. Do as though they had never spoken, and have a quiet little talk with yourself and your conscience. Keep a strangle-hold upon those people who tell you your mistakes, and give those who flatter you the marble heart without the slightest regret; and if ever you are in trouble and don't know what to do, come to me, and I'll tip you off." With this Fanny put her arm around her friend's neck, kissed her good-by, and was gone.

CHAPTER IV

THE WORM THAT TURNED

IT is four weeks since the Pennybaker ball, and during that time social duties had left the beautiful Countess scant respite or repose. To-night, however, she was at home. The place which Ravenna called home was an apartment situated in one of the most exclusive sections of Central Park West. It was on the second floor and faced the park. The apartment consisted of twelve rooms, furnished in the most lavish style that taste could devise and money supply. It was quite impossible for any one accustomed to the good things of life not to feel at home in this delightful spot, as cosy as it was sumptuous, with its magnificent furniture, tapestries and appointments that combined every luxury with every convenience. The front parlor, whose four large bay-windows overlooked the park, was octagon in shape, with a hand-painted plafond,

which in itself was a msterpiece of art. Heavy silken draperies and portières abounded, imparting to the room a semi-oriental effect. The wall facing the windows was partly covered with antique tapestry of rare texture. The centre of the ceiling was a magnificent piece of stucco-work representing the terrestrial globe, supported upon the shoulders of Atlas. The floors throughout the apartment were inlaid and covered at intervals with costly rugs that made footsteps inaudible. Next to the parlor, and connecting therewith, was a small anteroom which Nicholas had turned into a sort of lounging and smoking-room. Next to this was Countess Ivanovitch's boudoir. This sanctuary, that held all of this ravishing woman's little secrets, was a perfect dream of luxury and taste. The appointments and decorations throughout were of a delicate shade of pale blue, trimmed in bright gold. A large bed, with an immense tester supported by four richly carved Ionian columns, occupied the rear wall.

The other walls were occupied by large French mirrors held in place and connected with the ceil-

ing at the upper corners by little cupids of rare beauty. A large electric chandelier, whose tiny, multi-colored globes were made to represent in their ensemble a huge bouquet of roses, hung suspended from the centre. When lighted the effect was startling and beautiful in the extreme. Rich draperies, portières and silk curtains excluded from this charming retreat of a still more charming woman just enough of the daylight to throw upon the apartment that hush of soft, languorous semi-obscurity so restful to the eye and so seductive to the senses. The bed, the draperies, yea, even the walls, of this luxurious little boudoir seemed to exhale that fragrant perfume that renders the atmosphere about a beautiful woman so voluptuously intoxicating. Aside from the rooms just described there remained the other usual apartments, which it is needless to describe.

It is just seven o'clock. At nine o'clock Lord Brighton will call. Nicholas is busy in the library. The Countess is in her boudoir, in her maid's hands, dressing. She is about to face the most important moment in a woman's life—the moment upon which

will depend the happiness or woe of her entire future. What will her answer be? What are her thoughts, her hopes, her fears? She alone knows. At the present moment the little boudoir presents a mere chaos, as does the boudoir of every beautiful woman when she is dressing. The curtains are tightly drawn, every globe in the chandelier sends forth a different colored light. The radiator permeates the boudoir with genial warmth. Upon the divan, the chairs and bed rich gowns of silk and lace are spread in graceful profusion. A number of satin slippers of different hues, and, apparently, too small to fit any human foot, are lying about. The dresser is covered with the thousand and one requisites so indispensable to the woman of fashion. In the centre of the room, in an easy chair placed directly between the two large French mirrors, reclines Ravenna in the deepest of deep *negligé*. May we describe it? Why not? Well! She is dressed in naught but a richly embroidered lace chemise, that seemingly mocks all efforts to cover her charms of breast and neck; her little feet are bare; her long blonde hair is in the hands of her

French maid, who is about to transform the silky strands into a charming coiffure. Countess Ivanovitch enjoys that great pleasure of the true daughter of Eve—namely, of being dressed. She had just stepped out of the bath, and throwing on her Lazo-Camisa has given herself up to the deft fingers of Louise. The Countess's beautifully moulded, dimpled arms are resting in her lap, where her fingers are absent-mindedly punching tiny holes in her covering with one of the hair-pins she holds. Is there a woman who hasn't done likewise? Occasionally she looks up and contemplates her charming image in the mirror or gives some directions. Her dark eyes are shining with unusual lustre. Finally the maid has completed her task, and the Countess rises too look at her coiffure. As she stands there, every curve of her lovely body clearly defined and emphasized by that tantalizing, clinging affair called Lazo-Camisa, she resembles a goddess of beauty and passion; and we instinctively feel that Lord Brighton never had the suspicion of a chance to remain true to his resolution never to fall in love with a woman. But time flies; every

moment brings the portentious hour nearer; so the Countess proceeds with her toilet, which is soon completed. When Ravenna is ready she is truly beautiful enough to enrapture any one. The costume she has chosen for to-night is an exquisite pale blue silk with a long train trimmed in rich Venetian lace. The maid herself cannot withhold her admiration, and exclaims: "Madame looks *exquisement*, beautiful. Oh, *la, la!*"

This compliment pleases Countess Ivanovitch, who walked to the centre of her boudoir between the mirrors, where she could get a full view of herself; looking at her own beautiful reflection, she stood there fully ten minutes—that is at intervals, for from time to time she turned back a few steps, then sideways, then on again and measured the length of her long train. Here she paused a moment, gave a pinch to her waist with one hand, then with two hands, then raised these members—they were very white and pretty, with delicately tinted, highly polished nails—to the multifold braids of her hair with a caressing, half corrective movement. An observer might have fancied that

during those periods of self-inspection her face forgot its sadness, but as soon as she sat down again it began to proclaim that she was a very unhappy woman.

"Yes, Louise, you have done well to-night. I am more than pleased with the results. Perhaps I may take you with me back to Russia, if you care to go."

"Oh, Louise, *serais bien contente* to go wiz *Madame*," replied the maid with a bow.

"Well," continued the Countess, "you may go out to-night Louise. There are two tickets for the theatre in the little drawer of my escritoire, which were sent me and which I cannot use. You may take them and go to the play. But, if you go, you must hurry, for it is almost eight o'clock now. You may leave everything in here as it is and arrange it on your return. I shall be up late to-night and will not require your services any more." And opening a small escritoire near the window Countess Ivanovitch took the tickets and gave them to Louise. "You may go now," she added.

Louise took the tickets and bowed. "*Merci, bien Madame.* What hour does *Madame* desire Louise in zee morning?"

"Not before ten o'clock. Now go."

"*Tres bien, Madame,*" and with another bow Louise disappeared.

When the maid had gone, the Countess once more stood in front of her mirrors, where she slowly turned, giving every detail of her toilet a sweeping critical glance. She was evidently satisfied with herself, for a smile played about her lips.

"Thank heaven I am rid of Louise. She has an oily way of winding herself into one's private affairs that I don't fancy. But, after all, if she begins to know too much, why, I'll find a nice little pretext to discharge her."

Had the Countess possessed occult power or the ability to listen to what her maid at that moment was saying to herself, she probably would have sought that pretext at once, for Louise had scarcely reached her own little room when she said: "*Madame* was anxious to see Louise go and haz brought ze ticket just for that purpose. *Ah, la, la, eh*

bien! Neverzeless, Louise will tell Monsieur Charles to go wiz her to zee *Opera-Comique.*" A few moments later she had gone.

Meanwhile Countess Ivanovitch had walked to the drawing-room where she took a graceful position in the corner of a black velvet-covered divan trimmed in gold, against which her pale blue gown contrasted to great advantage. She had scarcely done so when she was somewhat frightened by the sudden appearance of Nicholas, whose footsteps she failed to hear.

He stopped upon the threshold and looked at her for a moment. "Sister, you are looking sweet enough to eat."

"Please don't be so vulgar in your remarks; it doesn't sound well from you."

"Oh, bosh, sister! What's slang for, if it isn't to be used in the privacy of one's family? Eh? But never mind, Ravenna, we haven't time to talk about such trifles now. Time is precious, and I want to give you a sort of a final dress rehearsal before Lord Brighton arrives. Let's see, what time is that bloody Englishman due?"

"Nine o'clock sharp. He sent me a message to that effect this morning. But, Nicholas, what have you been doing all day in the library? You can't have that much writing to do?"

"Oh, never mind, dear; I was making some drawings for my own pleasure," he carelessly replied, avoiding her gaze. "But let's go to work. Now then, Ravenna, I want to advise you. This Lord Brighton is so much in love with you that he hasn't got a grain of sense left. On the other hand, he is a very shrewd man, and an exceedingly suspicious one where women are concerned; so I was informed. Nevertheless, I think you have got him where you want him, and I believe that you can clinch it to-night. Did you tell me he would propose to-night?"

"No; and what is more, I can tell you that I never hated anything so much in all my life as I do this, for Lord Brighton is certainly in earnest and loves me with his whole heart and soul."

"Oh, nonsense! Why are you suddenly getting sensitive at this stage of the game? Why not reproach me—d-e-a-r—abuse me—villify me,"

he went on sneeringly. "Perhaps I would feel better then. Why not tell me that you hate and despise me for bringing you here and trying to help you get a multi-millionaire for a husband, because you wouldn't believe it? I adore you, my dear sister; I am delighted to be here with you and of service to you; I am charmed with the glowing prospects."

"No, Nicholas; but I am afraid that all this will end badly some day. I feel it; I can't help it."

Nicholas's face grew dark and stern at these words, and a sardonic expression distorted his lips. Walking over to the Countess he said in a fierce, commanding voice: "Don't anger me, Ravenna. Don't act the fool. There is no backing out of this. Do you hear?" and he seized her wrist so fiercely that she almost shrieked with pain. At the same time he bent down and peered straight into her eyes with a look so fierce and threatening that she couldn't utter a word. Continuing, while still holding her wrist in a vice-like grip, he said slowly and commandingly: "Don't you dare to

refuse Lord Brighton! Do you hear me? Remember that you are twenty-six and that you are an outcast, penniless only for what I choose to give you."

"No, Nicholas, I won't," in a terror-stricken voice, was all the trembling girl could say as he left the room.

For a few minutes after he had gone Ravenna remained motionless, as if plunged in deep thought. Her beautiful face bore an expression of profound anguish mingled with terror. Her lovely eyes were moist with suppressed emotion. What was there between these two people; what terrible secret bound them together? What strange, powerful influence did this young nobleman wield over her? Was it hypotic influence, or simply the domination of a powerful will adroitly exercised over one less strong? Could it be crime that bound them together, or was it—could it be—love? Was it not strange that this lovely woman, herself of a strong independent mind, an individuality that fully asserted itself when away from Nicholas, should quail and show complete subjection to his presence?

The Countess suddenly rose, and after nervously pacing back and forth in the room a few times walked over to the centre window and looked out upon the desolate park now covered with snow. She sighed deeply. "There is winter in my heart; desolation and loneliness. Oh, what would I give to have never seen him! But after all I have a chance, it comes to-night. Yes, I must grasp that opportunity, for it is my only salvation, and the like may never present itself again. If I succeed—ah, if I succeed, then, Baron Nicholas, you and I will have a day of reckoning; for I will confess all—all, regardless of consequence. I will relieve my heart, my conscience. I will throw myself upon his mercy. I am beautiful, I know it; I have power over men—poor weak men, who are, one and all, slaves of their passions. Yes, he loves me, I know. Loves me deeply and truly, and will help me throw off the yoke of infamy." Thus soliloquized the beautiful woman while awaiting Lord Brighton's call.

Lord Brighton during the past four weeks had been in constant attendance upon Ravenna. In

fact, he was a changed man since he had met her, and from a cold, unfeeling skeptic, in so far as women were concerned, had become a perfect cavalier. Nor had he been slow in taking advantage of her permission to call; for he was a frequent visitor at her apartments, and when not there was sure to be seen in her company speeding through the park behind his trotter; so that rumor soon coupled their names. Each day Ravenna received a bouquet of choice flowers, and each time Lord Brighton called he became more assiduous in his devotion. Evidently he was in love—not in the ordinary sense, but in the absolute, all-absorbing fashion of a man whose life is a blank without the woman of his choice, and who will move the universe to possess that woman. Some bright mind has said that love is a mental disease, curable only by the reciprocity of the affection of the one who has caused it. If this be true Lord Brighton was certainly so afflicted. At any rate it became quite obvious that the deep affection he had formed for Ravenna improved him greatly; so much so that even his friends marvelled at it, while Bob and

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Chauncey never ceased teasing him, and reminding him of how he had vowed never to be impressed by any woman that night at the club. His lordship, feeling himself caught red-handed, so to speak, finally gave in, and during a supper he gave to his friends took opportunity to lustily toast to the only peerless woman. As to Ravenna, her sentiments toward him had undergone some marked change since she had first agreed to receive him as friend and associate, until she finally found that he had won her respect and admiration. To-night she blushed nervously when the bell rang, took a hasty survey of herself in the mirror, and, as Lord Brighton was ushered into the drawing-room, she met him with outstretched hands. He was faultlessly attired, but pale to the very roots of his multicolored hair, as he kissed the hand Ravenna offered him. Lord Brighton had completely lost his former somewhat overbearing, money-proud demeanor. He seemed frightened at the violence of his own emotions in her presence. In truth we cannot blame him. Countess Ivanovitch, now perfectly composed, looked tantalizingly beautiful, as she grace-

fully reclined upon the divan, her lovely shoulders but partly draped by a diaphanous lace-shawl that seemed unwilling to cover their snowy whiteness. Her shapely hands were toying with a tiny gold chain suspended from her corsage. In her velvet eyes there lurked a bewitching languor.

"How are you, Lord Brighton?"

"Very well indeed, thank you, Countess," he replied in a trembling voice as he accepted the seat she offered him beside her upon the divan."

"It must be a disagreeable evening out, your hands are quite cold despite your heavy gloves," she sweetly commented, as her soft little hands rested for a moment in his.

"Oh, I did not feel or mind the temperature, my dear Countess, for though my hands were cold my heart was palpitating with warmth, and my thoughts aglow with the sense of being in your company."

"There, you are flattering again, Lord Brighton," and she took a small Japanese fan of dainty grace, which hung suspended from her waist by a golden chain, and tantalizingly tapped him upon

the arm, while she gave him a look so full of warm compassion that he trembled with agitation.

"Perhaps so, Countess, perhaps so," he repeated, as if in a dream. Then he got up and quickly paced back and forth a few times, as if trying to compose himself or brace himself for some portentous resolution; while she, under the guise of fanning herself, sat watching him through the fine ebony network of the fan; for, though her appearance did not indicate it, she knew with absolute certainty that Lord Brighton had reached the critical period in his life and was about to declare his love for her; the acceptance or refusal of which would mean, to a man of his peculiar characteristics, either happiness or utter ruin. She was now fully prepared and had her plans made. She sat still, watching the man whose face was ashen with emotion until he suddenly stopped directly in front of her, and in a tremulous voice said:

"Countess, have you ever been in love?"

"Oh! Lord Brighton! that's rather a leading question, don't you think?"

"Perhaps it is; but answer it, will you please?"

"Well, yes, Lord Brighton, I thought I was in love once, only to find that it was merely a fancy—one of these ephemeral afflictions of the heart that vanish with the change of day. The real sentiment of love, *la grande passion* as it is called, in all its intensity I have, as yet, never known; and, to be exact, I'm afraid of it, for I fear that if I ever love, it will, to me, mean life or death, heaven or hades, paradise or inferno; and should I find, as others have found, that I had placed my heart's affection upon a worthless object, what then, Lord Brighton?"

"Countess, you could not do that. You are too sensible a woman ever to make such a mistake or fail to recognize the tender passion where it really exists."

"Yes, I think I would be able to judge correctly, Lord Brighton."

"Then, Countess, let me confess to you that I love you dearly, madly, and," he added, seizing her hand and trembling with emotion, "that I respectfully crave the honor of your hand."

"Why, Lord Brighton!" Ravenna withdrew her hand with a gesture of surprise.

"Oh, do not feel surprised at this, Countess. It is but natural that I should lose my heart to you when all others have done so. You do not know me. You cannot know the depth and intensity of feeling that underlies my nature, which outwardly may seem cold and unfeeling."

"But, Lord Brighton, we have known each other but one short month."

"I know," interrupted Lord Brighton, somewhat embarrassed, "but what of that?"

"You confuse me, Lor——"

"Oh, do not interrupt me, I pray you, Countess. Let me tell you what my heart feels; let me tell you what a revelation you have been to me. True, I know you but a few short weeks; but even so, love knows no time, no restrictions, no judgment. It is blind; it follows but the promptings of the heart. Countess, listen to me. I am not a handsome man, and I know it—and perhaps I am unworthy of you, who are grand, and noble, and beautiful. And yet, I feel within my heart that life without you is nothing to me henceforth—that my existence will be void without the sunshine that you alone can bestow

upon it. I have been called a cynic, a woman-hater, a skeptic, by my friends, and somewhat of all these I have been until I met you; then, Countess, for the first time in all my life, I knew what love was; knew that I would not care to live without you; that I had met my fate."

"You cannot know what you are saying, Lord Brighton," she here broke in with well-feigned distress."

"Oh, yes, I do; believe me, I am sincere, absolutely so—you know I am. I am not seeking wealth. I have plenty of that. I am a rich man; money is no object to me. I seek happiness, and I know that you alone can bestow it; besides, I feel that I could make you happy. It would be my life's object to do so. No one knows better than I the power of wealth, yet I would gladly part from it all, if by doing so I could win your love; and," he continued, with a gesture of entreaty, "should you desire it, my wealth, all I have, is yours. I ask nothing in return but your love."

Had Lord Brighton been less madly in love he might have learned something more about the

power of money, for the effect the latter part of his ardent speech produced upon the lady was certainly up to modern ideas. He likewise might have noticed—had he not been blinded by the intensity of his feelings—that the portières near which they sat trembled perceptibly, as if some one hidden there had clutched them for support upon hearing his generous offer. Alas, Lord Brighton saw neither. He saw nothing but that beautiful, betwitching creature before him, with her lovely face and voluptuous arms and shoulders, radiant in their snowy whiteness beneath the electric light. When the Countess suddenly stopped fanning herself and became all attention, when the indifferent, somewhat bored expression in her beautiful eyes changed to one of warm sympathy and interest, he, with the selfishness peculiar to his sex, interpreted all this in his favor. He continued with renewed ardor:

"Yes, Countess, I confess that I have prided myself upon my immunity from love. In fact, I asked to be introduced to you merely to show my friends that even you could not impress me. Be-

hold me at your feet, your humble slave, asking mercy!" And in the intensity of his passion Lord Brighton dropped upon his knees before the Countess, and seizing her hands looked into her face with such earnest entreaty that she instinctively felt that he was sincere. Lord Brighton was never an ill-favored man, and all that was ordinarily harsh and offensive in his nature had disappeared under the refining influence of this profound affection. Besides, Countess Ivanovitch, aside from her appreciation of him, was too much woman not to feel a certain vanity and pride at seeing this proud and dominating man at her feet. Therefore, it was not without a touch of tenderness that she said: "Lord Brighton, the suddenness and intensity of your confession has somewhat unnerved me, and I feel hardly able to consider your proposal with the calmness of mind and heart it deserves. Will you accord me the time to reflect—to recover my composure?"

"Countess, it is but just that you should ask this; and it would be base on my part were I to ask more; yet, at the risk of incurring your great

displeasure, I beg of you to tell me now that you do not dislike me or reject me altogether. If you will do that, Countess, you will make me unspeakably happy, and will enable me to await your final answer with less— Well?"

Although her mind was fully made up as to her final reply, Countess Ivanovitch was far too clever a woman to permit Lord Brighton to win an easy victory. She therefore replied:

"What can I say? I have known you scarcely a month, during which I have had some little opportunity to learn your character. I am happy to say that there is nothing known to me now that causes me to believe you otherwise than a man of honor and exalted principles, which belief I hope my brother will share with me. Your confession of love for me and offer of marriage honor me greatly, and there is in your avowal that which denotes absolute sincerity. I thank you. I will add that your conduct towards me compels my respect, my friendship. I have freely given you the latter. Whether or not I can be more to you, Lord Brighton, permit me to decide with my own con-

science. Give me one week to consider your offer. It is the first favor I ask of your friendship. Will you grant it? "

These words were spoken with such sweet womanly dignity that Lord Brighton, though feverishly eager to know his fate, could only acquiesce. He got up, bowed profoundly, then passionately kissed her hand, and said: " In one week from to-day I shall know my fate. Adieu, Countess, until then," and bowing low again he left her.

For a few minutes after he had gone she sat motionless, buried in deep thought. Then she sighed deeply, adjusted her shawl about her shoulders and was about to leave the room when her brother Nicholas stepped from behind the portières. At sight of him Ravenna started perceptibly and began to tremble, which brought a ripple of satisfaction to his face. " Oh, don't be frightened, dear," he remarked in his most persuasive tone. " You didn't know I was there? " and he pointed to the heavy double portières that separated the drawing-room from the ante-room. Did you? "

" No, I didn't, Nicholas, I am sure."

"Well, I was, and I heard every word Brighton said. Oh, say, Sis, he's a bird, a darling, a wonderful catch! Ah!" he exclaimed, seeing the costly bracelet she wore, "what a beauty! Let me see, I believe we could get a couple of thousands on it in an emergency, don't you?"

"We will never pawn that bracelet. Never!"

"Never! Eh?" he replied, somewhat vexed. "Little sister is getting spunky now since she has Lord Oliver Brighton, of London, England, for a suitor. But all nonsense aside, you're doing finely, splendidly, I must say that. Few girls could excel you. I am proud of my pupil," and gently stroking her hair, he endeavored to kiss her.

"Don't, Nicholas, I have a sore throat. You had better not kiss me."

"Well, I will kiss your forehead then," he declared, with a smile.

If Ravenna was formerly responsive to his caresses, she now displayed no outward joy at his contact.

"Look here, Nicholas," she said in an icy tone, "I am getting heartily tired of this, and the sooner

you know it the better." With these words, for the first time in her life, she lifted her magnificent eyes to his and looked him squarely in the face.

Nicholas at first was speechless with astonishment and rage, but like all true cowards at heart he quailed before her gaze the very first time that she, whom he had heretofore completely controlled, opposed him; hence it was not without any outward sign of anger but with a hypocritical suavity of manner that he now replied: "You say you are tired of this, dear. Why? Aren't we making money enough? Haven't we found an easy mark? Have we not a vast fortune almost within reach in your *fiancé*, Lord Brighton? Besides, Ravenna, dear," he added, endeavoring to embrace her, "you know I love you dearly."

"I don't!" she promptly replied, as she gently but firmly repulsed him. "And what is more, I know that you don't. Do you mean to tell me that you can love me, and then deliberately place me in the way of men for mercenary purposes? Is it natural, logical, reasonable? Does a man who loves a woman sell her affection to other men for

gain? If it be love to stand behind that portière and hear me promise a man to be his wife, then, merciful God, what is love?"

"Love, Ravenna, is nothing nowadays without money. I have no money. You have none. We both need money; not a paltry few thousands, either, but lots of it, dear; lots of it. Once we get a good big pile we will quit all this nonsense, and go to some foreign land where we are strangers, and can live happily and contentedly all for ourselves," and he pulled the struggling girl to his breast.

She disengaged herself and sadly shook her head. "Nicholas," she said, "I wish I could live the past years over again. You know it well enough. I once loved you dearly—but blindly. I have entered into all your schemes and adventures willingly, voluntarily, thinking that—as long as they were not criminal in nature—they were permissible in these days of eternal strife and struggle for supremacy, where only the fittest survive. But, alas! there is no real happiness in a life of perfidy and adventure. I fear, Nicholas, my love for you is

dead; for I have discovered that the affection you had had for me was not love. Would that you had remained an honest man! Oh, gladly would I have shared your poverty in the humblest cabin and remained honest rather than live this life of gilded misery and adventure," and she burst into a flood of tears.

Nicholas was a polished rascal and an educated villain of the blackest kind, therefore he never wavered from his purpose, even when he saw this poor girl, whose great beauty and sweetness he had systematically tried to drag down to his own level, bitterly weeping. He had used her gifts and graces as bait for the furtherance of his own nefarious schemes. Her tears of genuine regret did not move him; his heart never softened toward her; and if ever he had claimed to love her, it was at this moment evident that his affections were dead. It was without the slightest feeling that he now said: "Don't waste your tears, but listen to me."

"It is useless, Nicholas, my heart is too full of sorrow. I feel that it is too late. You know that I once loved you. I gave up all for you. I sev-

ered the ties of family, dear ones and friends to follow the promptings of my heart which drew me toward you. I was a good, right-minded woman, incapable of wilfully wronging any one. I trusted you, thinking that with your great intellect, your manners and your personality it would be easy for you to earn an ample livelihood for us both. It never entered my mind that you—you could ask me to do things that were—if not downright dishonest, at least dishonorable. Yet, in contradiction to all honor and principle, you have used my affection for you to drag me through the mire; used my beauty as a bait for the realization of your daring schemes. I believed you each time you said that this would be your last scheme. And though I had not as yet done the worst, the enormity of it all came over me to-night, when your thirst for money made you lose all self-respect, dignity and manhood, and caused you to sell me for gain. All you have ever done to me I have freely forgiven—blaming no one but myself—but this last indignity has killed the last spark of affection I once bore you. You who, above all others, should

have been my protector, if only from a sense of honor and manhood, stood behind yonder curtain and listened to what Lord Brighton said to me, knowing that he means honorable marriage. What mother could it have been that nourished such a moral leper as you? Do you think that you can degrade me still further by leading this man on to destruction through me, your accomplice?" As she spoke the loathsomeness of her situation seemed to overwhelm her with all its horrors. As she finished she looked the veritable queen of outraged dignity. "No," she continued, stepping somewhat closer to him, who now began to cower before her towering figure and blazing eyes. "No, I will no longer be the creature that you would have me be. I refuse to lead a life of shame at your bidding and for your gain. Death itself I would prefer to such indignity. I shall marry Lord Brighton, and I shall be a true wife to him. Nicholas, you and I must part for ever—now, or as soon as possible. I wish you no harm, for though I loathe you now, I cannot forget what you have been to me in the past. Nor will I let you want for anything as

long as I have it. I shall ask my future husband for a large sum of money, which I will place to your credit, so that you may have a certain monthly stipend that will enable you to live. Do not delude yourself, Nicholas, in thinking that you can hurt me or ruin my prospects of marrying Lord Brighton, for by telling him the past—your past, our past—you will simply undermine your own future, which I think you will not do. For decency's sake, and our future peace of mind, let us preserve appearances before the servants. And now, good-night." With these words Countess Ivanovitch passed in front of him with the dignity of a queen, entered her own boudoir, the key to which was distinctly heard turning in the lock.

Nicholas was at first speechless from surprise, then he turned white with fury and gave himself up to a rage that almost smothered him. He paced up and down in the drawing-room like an enraged lion. He brought his fist down heavily on the table. He seized the draperies that covered the doors and tore them down, swept the bric-à-brac from the mantelpiece, and then he jumped upon the

divan Ravenna had occupied and stamped upon it like a wild beast. "Oh, damn the women; damn her!" he exclaimed. "They are all alike. But wait, I still have a chance. There's that Cameron girl. She's got a lot of coin, and I believe that it wouldn't be hard to take her away from Chauncey Lamont. At any rate I'll try. 'Twould never do for me to remain here, for she will marry Lord Brighton, and I—am fired!" Saying which he gave a hoarse, diabolical laugh and walked out.

CHAPTER V

FALSE, BUT FAITHFUL

CHAUNCEY and Beatrice Cameron had agreed to wed when the latter would reach her twenty-third birthday—the time approved by her father for a matrimonial plunge. But Chauncey, like the queer, impetuous boy he was, during his daily calls upon Miss Cameron had pleaded his cause so successfully and so well that Beatrice one day consented to take a sleigh ride with him through Jersey. Now, it must be admitted that though many queer things happen in Jersey, there was nothing especially remarkable in the fact that these two lovers should want to carry their young happiness to the home of marshes, meadows and mosquitoes. Nor is it claimed here that either Beatrice or Chauncey had the slightest intention of entering matrimony on the rapid transit plan.

It must not be implied by any manner of means

that Chauncey and Beatrice simply eloped and got married. Nay! Far be it from us to even whisper such a thing. Yet, when Chauncey and Beatrice did return to civilization from the Jersey jungles they were Mr. and Mrs. Chauncey Lamont, and ready for papa Cameron's benediction. The peculiar part of the whole affair, however, was that they really did marry after the comedy of errors which preceded the event.

The day was one of those beautiful, clear winter days such as you read about in books. The snow couldn't possibly be whiter, or in a better condition for sleighing. Chauncey, who owned a fine cutter and a fast horse, had them brought over to the Jersey side, where the rig was awaiting them, about nine that morning. Beatrice and Chauncey both were in gay spirits and warmly dressed. They started from Jersey City intending to go as far as Westwood to see some friends and return by moonlight. Beatrice felt in such high good humor as they flew along the smooth country road behind Chauncey's fast trotter, with the bells merrily jingling in the clear morning air, that she wanted

to shout; but this being somewhat bad taste for a well-bred girl, she contented herself by tickling and pinching her *fiancé*, who having his hands full with the horse could only retaliate by tickling her shell-like little ears with the points of his mustache. Every few minutes the tickling was repeated, until he, unmindful of the reins, let them slip from his grasp. Suddenly the horse bolted, then reared upon his hind legs, plunged forward with a spring, and away he flew, dragging the sleigh and its occupants through the country in mad flight; bouncing and scratching, bumping and jingling discordantly upon its invisible runners. Beatrice, now with a terrified face, clung frantically to the coat sleeve of her lover. "Heavenly powers!" she murmured. "Where are we going?" Chauncey, bewildered by the unlooked-for situation, snatched Beatrice in his arms and was about to spring from the flying vehicle when, with a loud shriek, she cried, "Look there!" The maddened animal had now reached a bend in the road, the sleigh careened, and the two found themselves spilled out and engulfed in a large snow bank. Extreme surprise for

a moment kept them sitting still. What a picture! When they did pick themselves out of the engulfment they looked a very ill-pleased couple, and indeed in what met their eyes there was little to be pleased with. Their hats slouched down over their faces, as if protecting them from the road, while on the other side a group of Jerseyites were circling about them in the liquid snow. As Beatrice looked at the really comical figure of Chauncey she thought him the ugliest thing she had ever seen. It threw her into a state of irritation that was quite out of proportion to her humorous, tickling mood of only a short while ago. She pressed her hands to her eyes to shut out the sight. "It's too horrible! I shall go back, I shall go back!" Chauncey held out his hand to assist Beatrice and help her back into the sleigh again. While so doing his tongue was gently moving along his upper lip good-naturedly. "You are irritating," said Beatrice angrily. "This is the darkest day of my life."

The young man gave a clear, fresh laugh. "It was you, dear, who proposed this ride."

She turned her head with a jerk and gave him an arctic stare.

"If you like, I will take the blame," he said, as he gave his joyous laugh again. "If I had not been convinced that you wanted a sleigh ride I should never have taken the risk of bringing you to this dreadful country."

"This comical country, this delightful country," supplemented Beatrice; and they both broke into the most animated laughter as he scrambled in beside her, and off they flew. Nor were they the only couple sleighing, for many a pink-cheeked country lass in company of her "steady" flew by, and many a swell sleighing outfit, loaded to the gunwales with bundled up society folks, went past, laughing, singing and having a merry time. Good sleighing is a rare sport, consequently all who could get hold of a sleigh took advantage of it. With Beatrice and Chauncey everything went famously. They stopped at Hackensack, where they dined and wined to some extent. After dinner, while Beatrice was fixing her hair, Chauncey excused himself for half an hour while he went to see an ac-

quaintance. This done, he returned to the hotel where he had left Beatrice, and they drove on as far as Westwood, where they called upon some friends, who entertained the young couple royally. Quite late they started for home. They had had a jolly time, and as their horse trotted along the quiet country road, the moon shining brightly down upon them, Chauncey handed Beatrice the reins and asked her to try her hand at driving while he would warm his own hands a bit. In reality his hands stole softly about his sweetheart's waist, as he asked: "Beatrice, are you happy?"

"Why shouldn't I be, Chauncey? Am I not with you?" And she puckered up her little mouth for a kiss, which he dutifully deposited thereon. "But, Chauncey," continued Beatrice, when the echo of the kiss had died away midst the hills of New Jersey, "don't you think it is getting very late—and cold?"

"Why, yes, darling, of course it is," he eagerly replied. "I think we had better stop over at Hackensack to-night, darling, and go back in the morning."

"Why, no, Chauncey! How about papa? He would be awfully worried over my not being home all night; besides——"

"Oh, that's the least consideration," confidently replied Chauncey. "I'll telephone him when we reach Hackensack."

And so they agreed that they would stop over at Hackensack and return home in the morning. They reached Hackensack about nine o'clock and went to the best hotel, where they were assigned to two rooms—numbers five on the second and on the third floor. Beatrice, feeling fatigued, after supper bade her sweetheart good-night and went to her room, while he went to telephone and see that his horse received proper attention.

Meanwhile Beatrice had reached room number five on the second floor. After carefully bolting the door, she, womanlike, took a look around. The room she found herself in appeared to be about the best the hotel contained—in fact, it looked to Beatrice like a bridal-chamber. It was a large apartment, furnished in pale-blue flowered cretonne throughout, with an adjoining ante-room, wherein

stood a large bed with beautiful brass fittings and a large pale blue tester. One corner of the front room was cut off by a pale blue screen of rural design, behind which was an elegant dresser and toilet table. In the centre stood a fine mahogany table with books, magazines and stationery, the latter bearing two pale blue doves in the corner. There was a telephone, a speaking tube and a call-bell near the door. For a moment Beatrice stood lost in thought. "Surely," she finally exclaimed, "this is the bridal-chamber, but why? Could it be Chauncey's work? 'Twould be just like him. Nevertheless, he is a little bit—" and she gave a sweet smile that spoke volumes. "Any way, I am going to ask him about it to-morrow, and if that impudent hotel clerk took it upon himself to take me for a bride, I'll have Chauncey just lecture him good and hard. They say hotel clerks know bridal couples a mile off." Hanging up her long coat Beatrice now began to disrobe. "I think I shall take a hot bath before going to bed, I am all stiff with cold, and that awful head-end collision with Squire Hopkins's snow bank," she soliloquized,

throwing down her large hat. Then she deftly removed a handful of hairpins and other hardware from her hair, causing it to fall in blonde profusion over her well-rounded shoulders. Carefully selecting all the longer part of the blonde profusion, her pretty fingers softly stole beneath its silken meshes, a small string was removed, there was a slight tug, and—the switch was hers! A moment later her beautiful pompadour gave up two nice yellow rats, which joined the aforesaid switch upon the dresser. Whereupon Beatrice, after removing a few layers of her remarkable complexion took off her bodice, and—while a hush fell upon the atmosphere—removed a part of her lovely form in the shape of a pair of bust-forms—filled with aching void. Next came a set of false hips and a bustle, all of which she, like an orderly girl, put upon the dresser behind the screen. Then Beatrice lightly, gaily tripped over to the wash-stand and poured out some water. This done, she put two of her shapely little digits into her rose-bud mouth. There was a gurgling sound as of some rippling brook, and she carefully dropped a

partial set of artificial teeth into the transparent liquid. A sense of relief overspread the fair girl's face as she now continued disrobing. "Thank heaven!" she exclaimed. "I feel more like myself now." And can the gentle reader doubt it? When Beatrice had reached that stage of dress, or rather undress, where there is nothing left to describe, she exclaimed: "Great heavens! Here I want to take a bath and haven't a kimono or anything to put on. Oh, I know, I'll put on my long coat!" This done, she carefully opened her door and listened out into the hall. Not a sound could be heard. Yes, she could risk it! The bath-room was only one flight up.

There was a noise like the flapping of wings, and she had disappeared.

Chauncey, meanwhile, had duly informed papa Cameron by long-distance 'phone that Beatrice would stop over at Hackensack that night and would be back in the morning, giving as the only reason his fear that the cold night air and wind might be too much for the dear girl. Here's where Chauncey, like all lovers, was a strategist, for he

knew that nothing in the world could raise him higher in the estimation of the old general than this apparent tender solicitude for his only daughter. Thus Chauncey got a very pleasant reply. This done, he, rather fatigued and with the knowledge of a solemn duty nobly performed, returned to the hotel, walked to the desk and got the key to his room, which was number five. "What floor, please?" he curtly asked the clerk, who sang out, "Second floor."

Chauncey, being deeply in love, hence at peace with papa Cameron, himself and the world at large, lit a fresh cigar and slowly ascended to the second floor, where he soon located number five. Finding the door unlocked, he put his key in his coat pocket and walked in. "Ah," he exclaimed, "somebody lit the light for me. How kind!" When he saw the pale blue furniture. "What's this? Looks like the bridal-chamber. Bless my soul, I believe it is! What in the name of Sam Henderson made that hotel clerk think it? I don't remember acting the fool or holding Beatrice's hand when we came into this hotel. These hotel clerks are altogether

too fresh. Wonder if sweetheart upstairs had anything to do with it. Hardly. Any way, I'll ask her in the morning; and if I find that it was the work of that grinning idiot downstairs— Oh, I'll give him a call down to-morrow that he won't forget for a time. I thought he had a funny smile on his face when I came up. Any way, I am in the bridal-chamber, I believe, and if it is somewhat previous, what of it? It gives me a chance to rehearse. So here goes." Saying which he began to remove his overcoat, vest, collar, cravat and waistcoat. When he got that far, he carefully untied the strings of a corset—man's corset as it is called, such as is worn by the German army officers, who are fastidious about their waist-line. This he hung upon the screen. Then he got to his trousers and underwear. Here he paused again, shook his head and said: "It's a shame, a monumental shame, if I have to say it myself, to deceive dear, sweet Beatrice like this. But I love her; yes, I do, and I will be good and kind to her. I ought to be. A beautiful girl like her, with a form like a Venus, marrying a bald-headed old chappie like me. But

then, all is fair in love and war." With these words he softly lifted something from his head, which proved a remarkably well made *toupé*, so perfect in fact that it was practically impossible to distinguish it from the natural growth. He looked at it a moment and sighed. "I would gladly give all of father's money if I could exchange that dummy for the real thing to-night. But, after all," he added, "it's been a good scalp if it is artificial; besides, I shall look like an oasis in the desert among the bald heads in the front row while I have it on," as he caressingly patted the hairy roof of his dome of thought.

With these words Chauncey took the hairy wonder and carefully, lovingly, hung it upon the corner of the screen. His clothing he put away in one of the two wardrobes in the bedroom; his shoes under the bed. Then he turned out the gas, pulled the portières between the sitting and bedroom, went over to the bed, dropped in, and a few minutes later was sound asleep. For ten minutes nothing disturbed the serenity of the sleeping hotel, where the majority of guests turned in at

nine P. M. and rose at six A. M. Suddenly a door on the third floor was carefully opened, and a woman's head all done up in papers peeped out. 'Twas Beatrice, fresh from the bath, who now carefully looked up and down the silent hall. Then she hurried by, noiselessly slipped downstairs to the second floor and into her room. "Ah, saved! Why, somebody turned out the gas!" she exclaimed, finding the room in darkness. "The very idea! But then I suppose that is the rule of the hotel. The chambermaid or porter probably made the rounds, saw the light and turned it out. I wonder where the matches are. Oh, yes, there was a box of matches on the table." And feeling over the table in the dark she soon found them, struck one and relit the gas. When the room was once more lit up she was about to remove her coat and retire, when her eyes fell upon the corset hanging over the screen. "For heaven's sake, did I leave my corset hanging up there for an advertisement? I am getting awfully thoughtless. 'Twould never do to let the chambermaid see those empty affairs when she comes to look after the fire in the morn-

ing, for she would be delighted to tell every woman in the house about the little there was to the *bride*." Saying this, she walked over, picked up the corset and was about to throw it over the screen when she thought it felt rather strange and held it up to the light. The moment she looked at it closely she dropped it and rubbed her eyes. "What is this? Am I dreaming? Or does a hot Jersey bath produce hallucinations?" Again she picked up the corset. "Looks like mine," examining the maker's name. "P. D., that's the make I wear. Straight front, no hips, three hooks, French style. But where are the busts? It's perfectly flat—flat as a pancake. Perhaps I am half asleep. Wait!" and she covered her eyes with her hand for a moment and then removed them. "Yes, it's a corset. But there's something wrong somewhere. Surely there is." Dropping the corset she walked over toward the other side of the screen to see whether her corset was there. As she did so she brushed against something suspended therefrom. Like a bat it fluttered as it gracefully settled down upon the floor, where it lay still. "What is this?" She

walked over hesitatingly, looked at it and uttered a cry. "Murder! Police! Somebody has been murdered here! The top of a human head!" She was pale to the very roots of her curl-papers, and was about to scream again when there was a sudden commotion behind her, and turning around she beheld, sticking out of the portières, the astonished face and highly-polished bald head of her *fiancé*, half asleep and with not a hair in sight except in his mustache, the ends of which were carefully wrapped up in "kids."

"Why, Beatrice!"

"Why, Chauncey!"

"What does this mean, Beatrice?" exclaimed Chauncey, who recovered his speech first. "How sweet and loving of you to have come to me—to my room! Oh, Beatrice, I shall never forget——"

"I come to your room? Why, what do you mean, sir? Your room, sir? How dare you, sir? It is you who came to my room, sir." Then suddenly bursting into tears: "Oh, Chauncey, I would never have thought you could do anything so unprincipled; besides, besides—" and she began to

sob hysterically. "Oh, it's awful! Somebody has been murdered here. It's a woman, I am sure. There is her corset and the top of her head!"

"Why, Beatrice; listen to me, darling," said the strange being between the portières with a wild, frantic look in his eyes. "You are wrong; you wrong me altogether; this is my room."

"It's mine!" she hotly interrupted him. "Don't try to smooth over your villainy. There's no use. You just wanted to ruin my reputation, that's all. Oh, my, what shall I do? What will people think of me? I shall never be able to look anybody in the face again," and she again burst into tears. Just then there was a loud knock upon the door, and a voice from the outside asked: "Hello in there! What's the matter? Did any one holler murder?"

"Oh, heavens, Chauncey," entreatingly gesticulated Beatrice, "save my name, my reputation! Please do, I implore you! Don't let them know I'm in here!" And she fell upon her knees.

"Never fear," whispered Chauncey. Then he said aloud: "No, there is nothing the matter in here. Why should any one holler murder? You

must be drunk out there. And I want you to understand that you can't wake me up this time of the night with your pipe dream. I shall make a complaint to the office to-morrow."

"It's beggin' yer pardon, sor," came back in a rich Irish brogue. "Sure I taught I heard some one calling murder, sor; and I wanted to find the victom, sor. Oi am only the porter, sor, and it was my duty, sor. Excuse me, sor. Good-night, sor."

"Oh, go to Halifax, sir!" replied Chauncey, making frantic faces at Beatrice to keep quiet.

When the porter had gone, Beatrice, now somewhat calmer, entreatingly asked: "Now, Chauncey, do tell me how all this happened. It's too awful to think of."

"But, Beatrice, why did you come to my room? If you explain that to me, then I might know."

"Why, this is not your room. It is mine."

"Beatrice, what is the use in trying to smooth it all over? Tell me the truth; I will love you just as much."

"Oh, Chauncey, have you no respect for me? Why do you insult me thus? This is my room.

I came here immediately after supper. You can ask the hotel clerk right now, if you wish."

"Oh, I couldn't go to him, if I wanted to. Not for a million."

"Well, but, Chauncey, when I got my key he said, 'Room number five, second floor, miss.'"

"Strange, he said the same to me."

"But, Chauncey, for heaven's sake tell me about this," and she kicked the human scalp lying upon the floor; and picking up the corset she threw it on top of the wig, and pointing to both exclaimed: "Chauncey, you have basely deceived me! You have misused my confidence and love to further your base and lecherous designs. You have lured me to this hotel and to this room, with the connivance of the hotel clerk, to ruin my reputation. But more than that, not satisfied with all this infamy, you have lured me here to witness your debaucheries; for here are the evidences of your base deception. There is a woman in that room, for here is her corset. Ah, shame on you, shame, you wretch!" As her hand absent-mindedly sought the polished surface and the strangely missing vegetation.

"For God's sake, listen to me; you are wronging me. It's all a terrible mistake and inexplicable error by somebody. I swear it."

"Then how can you explain the presence here in my room of another woman's corset?"

"Oh, darling, that's easy if you will only let me explain."

"Go on."

"Well, Beatrice—oh, Beatrice, how can I tell you—how confess it? That h-a-i-r and that c-o-r-s-e-t are both mine—mine, dear."

"Hush! How dare you tell me this? Why make your infamy doubly vile? That corset is not yours, for if it were I would know it."

"Sweetheart, they are; I swear it. And it is only because I love you so dearly, and feared you would never marry me if you knew, that I kept the truth from you. Forgive me, and believe me when I say that it was only my love for you that made me deceive you. Here, look and convince yourself," and he gently swayed his enamelled superstructure back and forth.

Beatrice gave a cry of dismay when she saw the

unvarnished truth and beheld the miserable, imploring look in his eyes. Her heart finally softened, and she could not help feeling for the unfortunate man. Seeing this, Chauncey took new hope, and continued: "And, Beatrice, I also wear that corset which you thought belonged to some woman. It's a man's corset, dear, and I am not the only one on Fifth Avenue who wears them. There are others whose fine shapes the girls admire. Forgive me, won't you, Beatrice?" Suddenly she started. She remembered her own physical shortcomings. Thus, with a guilty, embarrassed look, she hesitatingly replied:

"Chauncey, there is one reason which prompts me to forgive you, and that is your kindness and nobility in overlooking my own physical imperfections; and—and—Chauncey, dear, I now implore you upon my bended knees to forgive me for my deceptions," and she sank upon her knees, imploringly stretching out her hands.

"Why, Beatrice!" he almost shrieked with astonishment, for up to the present moment he had not discovered her shortcomings. "W-h-y, I thought you a Venus and a marvel of beauty!"

"Oh, Chauncey, please don't—dont mock me, for although I am false, I am faithful; and—and, Chauncey, if you will only forgive me, I will never deceive you again, and will love you all the more because—because—" And she silently pointed to the barren waste upon his head, adding: "Will you forgive me?"

"But, Beatrice, I don't understand you. What is the meaning of these? Do you mean to say that all these false things are yours—bust, rats, bustle, switch, corset, teeth, inflated hips?" And he looked around for more.

Despite himself Chauncey could not hide the expression of surprise at the sight of all these strange feminine objects before him, but managed to say:

"I have promised you never to lie again, and if I were to tell you now that I could overlook these things I would tell another lie. But, Beatrice, when you get them all on, then I certainly will overlook them. I swear it!" And he added: "I only hope that when I get my hair back on my head, and my corset on, that you will overlook them

also. Now is it a bargain, Beatrice? Promise me that we will be the same sweet lovers we have always been, and that the world shall never know that there is rubber in your hips."

"And no hair upon your head. It's a bargain, dear?" And he stretched his hand through the curtain and placed it over her mouth.

Beatrice took his hand and said: "It is, Chauncey."

"And now, Beatrice, I will ask, and I wish you to grant it. Let us marry in the morning. Let there be no delay. Will you?"

"Well, Chauncey, if you wish it so, I will marry you to-morrow; especially in view of this occurence, which I believe is all the fault of that horrid hotel clerk, for he told me room five, second floor. I am sure of it."

"And he told me the same thing. Ah, I have an idea, I understand it all. When we registered and asked for two rooms he though it all a bluff; why I cannot now explain. Any way, Beatrice, it won't do to say a word to him about it, for if we do the cat will be out of the bag, and you know

this cat must stay in the bag. But, dear, I am awful cold and tired standing here without my cranial covering. Can't I have my hair and corset?"

Beatrice, half touched, half amused by this pathetic appeal, handed her sweetheart his indispensables through the curtain. "Here they are, Chauncey; and now, if you love me, you will dress and vanish ere we are discovered. I will go behind the screen and sit there until you are dressed and go upstairs to your room. If you reach there without any one seeing you, knock twice; if you are seen, knock three times upon the floor, for your room is directly above mine."

"Very well, dear; to-morrow you will be Mrs. Chauncey Lamont."

Beatrice, blushing at the mention of her future name, walked over to the screen, and putting it around herself sat down. He quickly dressed, laughing softly to himself, then shook his head through the curtain and called to his watching sweetheart, "Beatrice, do you know that you look for all the world like the bath cabinet adver-

tisement, with the lady's head sticking out of the screen?"

"I guess I do."

"Beatrice, if this thing ever gets out we will have to emigrate to Europe. Why, it would cost me all of father's million to square myself with the boys; besides, imagine if 'Puck' or 'Judge' would ever get a hold of it! Why this joke would make them famous. Heavens, I can see my finish, if ever it does get out."

"But, Chauncey, it mustn't."

"Of course it mustn't, for if it does we are done for." Directly Chauncey was dressed he came out, walked over to the screen, where only his sweetheart's head protruded; taking her face between his hands he kissed her repeatedly. "Beatrice, you are a fascinating creature—unadorned—and I love you far better this night than ever before."

"And so do I you, Chauncey."

"I must go now. So good-night, and be sure to lock your door behind me. To-morrow we will wed. Good-night again, little one."

With these words he carefully opened the door

and slipped out of room number five on the second floor. A few moments later two soft knocks on the ceiling of Beatrice's room told the listening girl that her *fiancé* had safely reached his room without being discovered, and that consequently her reputation was safe. "Thank heaven!" she fervently exclaimed as she once more put out the gas, slipped into the bed, still warm with her sweetheart's pressure, and with a "God bless you, Chauncey!" upon her lips, went to sleep.

The next morning at nine o'clock Chauncey and Beatrice were duly married, and immediately returned home, where, after a council of war, they decided to confess their matrimonial plunge to papa Cameron, before the papers could get it. This they did, carefully avoiding any allusion to the events preceding their romantic union. General Cameron was ripping mad at first, for he had planned an elaborate wedding for his only daughter, but when Chauncey assumed all the blame and humbly pleaded as sole excuse his great love for Beatrice and their famous Jersey sleigh ride, and when Beatrice put her arms about the general's

neck, asking him midst kisses to forgive them, the old gentleman could no longer resist the child of his bosom, whom he adored and who had made his old age happy. So he freely forgave and blessed them.

A week later General Cameron presented his daughter, Mrs. Chauncey Lamont, with a check of adequate proportions and the deeds to a handsome mansion as a wedding gift, while Chauncey's father, happy to know that his somewhat gay son was safely married to a worthy and wealthy girl, gave him a snug little fortune as an independent start in life. Some few days later Mr. and Mrs. Lamont were on their honeymoon to the sunny shores of Italy, happy as two larks.

CHAPTER VI

A GLIMPSE OF PARADISE

IT was a frosty winter evening. Like a luminous ball the moon had risen in cold, silvery splendor. The big, denuded trees in the park began assuming fantastic shapes as the fast-falling gloom enveloped them in its mantle of mystery, proclaiming night. The avenues alongside the park were deserted save by an occasional, swiftly-moving car, carrying its human freight toward food and rest, or by the hasty step of a belated shop girl hurrying home. In the luxurious apartment of Countess Ivanovitch complete silence reigned. Ravenna had given her servants, except one, an evening off. She wanted to be undisturbed, for it was the evening upon which Lord Brighton was to return for her answer. Dinner over, Ravenna, simply gowned, had sought the drawing-room, there to await Lord Brighton's coming. She was in a strange, melancholic mood, re-

clining in her favorite place upon the divan near the window facing the park. Her eyes were fixed in the distance, and there was a far away expression in her face, showing that she was gazing without seeing, and that the solitary wintry landscape upon which her eyes rested left no record upon the film of her mind. Never before had she felt as she did this night. Like an endless chain the shadows of the past arose before her mental gaze. As they silently glided by, some gay and joyous, others gloomily hiding their faces as if in shame, her countenance presented a fascinating study of ever-changing emotions worthy of an artist's skill. Ravenna was far from being composed to-night. All day she had been in a state of nervous restlessness which, as the hour approached, became almost hysteria. Was it because she felt that the anticipated interview meant the happiness or woe of her whole future life? Was it the spectre of that irrepressible past, that would rise before her mental vision try as she would to keep it down; or, stranger still, had Ravenna's heart suffered a shock, and was a new life, new happiness struggling for su-

premacy within her? She was endeavoring to fathom her manifold sensations when her reveries were interrupted by a ring at the bell and the expected caller was announced. A haunted look was in Lord Brighton's eyes as he entered her presence. His haggard face plainly showed that the demon of incertitude and suspense had played havoc with him during the short interval since they had met. Evidently he had passed sleepless nights trying to foretell the result of this call, and looked genuinely miserable as he respectfully pressed his quivering lips to the Countess's outstretched hand.

"How are you, Lord Brighton?"

"As well as the circumstances permit me to feel, my dear Countess," replied he, with a look so full of entreaty that Ravenna was touched despite herself."

"Lord Brighton," she said, with a sweet smile, "I realize the importance of this interview to us both," and she blushed confusedly.

"Countess," replied he, in a voice trembling with suppressed emotion, "let me know my fate."

"First," interrupted Ravenna, "I want you to

sit down there, opposite me, where I can look into your face," and she gently pushed him into a comfortable arm-chair opposite her divan. He obeyed mechanically, and with an imploring look said:

"Speak to me, I pray you. Do not let me remain longer in this awful suspense. It is torture."

"Well, Lord Brighton, I have considered your proposal carefully and have questioned my heart——"

"And?" eagerly queried he with trembling lips as he took Ravenna's hand. "And?"

"I will try to make you happy, if it is within my power," and she blushed violently.

At these words Lord Brighton jumped up, and falling upon his knees before Ravenna he seized her in his arms, while gently endeavoring to remove the hands that covered her face. "My God, Ravenna, do you really mean it? Do you mean to say that you will be mine—mine—mine? Oh, do answer, darling! Tell me that I am not dreaming and that this great and unexpected happiness is all reality," and in his ecstasy he cov-

ered her face, her eyes, her hair with passionate kisses.

Her only answer was a kiss, which she placed upon his forehead. Then she suddenly disengaged herself from his arms, and sadly dropping her head upon his breast burst into a flood of tears. "Oh, Oliver, help me! and—and I will love you dearly —and honestly," and she sobbed as though her heart would break.

Lord Brighton looked up in astonishment, then stepping off at arm's length he held her gently, so that he could fully see the quivering face of the beautiful girl as she endeavored to control the convulsive sobs that shook her frame.

"Why, what does this mean? What does it mean, Ravenna? Are you in trouble? Are you unhappy? Is there any one whom you fear?" There was genuine amazement and heartfelt sympathy in his voice. His words seemed to bring her back to the realization of her situation, for the next moment she became calm, wiped the tears from her face and laughed—a queer, constrained laugh that could deceive none but a lover. "Forgive me,

Lord Brighton. Please do! I am hysterical, foolish, and don't know what I am saying. How silly of me to mar this happy moment by my nonsense!" and noticing that he still looked at her doubtfully, she put her arms about his neck and kissed him. "Won't you forgive me, dear?" with a look of tender entreaty.

If Lord Brighton still doubted, her caresses disarmed him, for he gently lifted her face to his, and with intense pathos and tenderness replied: "Will I forgive you, darling? What a question! What is there to forgive? But, dearest, sweetest one," he added, "your grief went straight to my heart; and if you have any trouble, why, I beg of you to tell me. I will be your champion from this moment on," and he gently patted her lovely blonde hair. "Are you sure you were merely hysterical?"

"Yes, Oliver dear," with a new caress, and seemingly just as anxious now to hide the real cause of her sudden outburst of grief as she had been previously anxious to confide it to him. But what can a man see when he is in love? Nothing. He is blind, and it might well be said that he is mentally

unbalanced for the time being. However that may be, Lord Brighton was too passionately possessed by the ravishing Countess, who had just promised to become Lady Brighton, to longer doubt the truth of the excuse she had given as the cause for her strange emotion a while ago. He sat down upon the divan, drew her to him, then whispered—between ardent kisses—all those sweet nothings into her ear that lack sense to all but lovers. Suddenly he stopped in one of his effusions and said: "Ravenna, you have made me unspeakably happy this evening, but there is still another favor I wish to beg of you, and I trust you will grant it."

"You frighten me; what can it be?"

"That you marry me at your earliest convenience, darling. Will you?"

"Why, Oliver, don't you think you are somewhat hasty?"

"I know I am," replied Lord Brighton, "but there are several reasons which prompt this request. First, my dear, I expect to be called away at short notice on important business that permits of no delay, and which may keep me away for several

months. Second, because I love you madly," and he pressed her to his breast, "and just can't do without you, darling."

"But——"

"Yes, I know, dear, what people will say. Well, we don't care what people say. Besides, I have got too much money for them to say anything. So do not let that trouble your dear blonde head, my own. Just open that sweet little mouth and say, 'Yes, Oliver, I'll marry you to-morrow.' I know you'll keep your word."

The Countess's objections having been vanquished, she said with a smile: "Yes, Oliver, I'll marry you soon."

"That's a sweet girl, now," and with that he fumbled in his coat pocket for something, and took from a tiny leather case a superb pearl ring of rare lustre and exquisite design, which he gently slipped upon her finger. "There, sweetheart, and may our future happiness be as pure and limpid as this gem."

"Oh, how lovely! What a beautiful gem!"

And she kissed him sweetly.

"Now," continued Lord Brighton, "there are merely a few details to be arranged ere I go. Can you or will you be ready for a strictly private ceremony a week from to-morrow night?"

"Yes, dear."

"Very well then, darling. I will attend to all details—license, witnesses and all—we will simply have a private ceremony, and a wedding reception on our return from our business trip. We will leave in about ten days. After the ceremony we will remain here, where my darling feels so much at home, and on our return I will build the finest mansion on Fifth Avenue, if it costs a million, for I want my beautiful wife to have the best of everything. By the way, dear, does your brother know about our engagement, or rather of your contemplated reply to my proposal?"

"My brother!" she repeated, while a sudden pallor overspread her happy face at the mention of Nicholas. "My brother! Why, yes, he knew, and even approves of it," saying which she hid her face upon his shoulders so that he might not notice her alarm, which was, however, an unnecessary pre-

caution, for Lord Brighton was in too happy a frame of mind to note these mysterious manifestations.

"I am glad of that; very glad indeed," he said, kissing her. "I must bid you good-night—good-night, and until to-morrow, darling."

The two took an affectionate farewell of each other, and Lord Brighton left.

A week after the events related Lord Oliver Brighton of London, England, in strictest privacy, and attended by only two of his most intimate friends, was married to Countess Ravenna Ivanovitch. Baron Nicholas, in a charming note addressed to Lord Brighton, greatly regretted his inability to be present at the ceremony which made his dear sister Lady Brighton.

Lord and Lady Brighton after the wedding gave an informal reception to a select few of their friends at the latter's apartments, where the newly-wedded couple intended to remain for the time preceding their departure. We will now pause and leave the newly wedded pair to themselves and their happiness in the cozy apartment for a few days.

CHAPTER VII

HERBERT STANLEY

THE day following Countess Ivanovitch's marriage Bob Armstrong was in his well-appointed studio writing. The apartment contained every convenience that wealth could afford. On his right stood a small smoking-table. Upon a Persian rug at his feet lay an immense St. Bernard dog, with his large head resting upon his big paws; he was quietly sleeping, although every once in a while his big brown eyes would open and for a moment rest with watchful, loving gaze upon his master's face. Bob was an odd man, quite different from the average bachelor of wealth. One of his most marked tastes was his fondness for children and animals; he maintained a well-known kennel of blooded dogs as well as a stable full of fine horses at his country seat up the Hudson. The animal now lying at his feet was Bob's inseparable

companion when in town. He had raised him from a small pup, which he had purchased some years ago on one of his trips through the Alps, from one of the monks at the hospice of St. Bernard, the well-known original breeders of these valuable beasts, which they trained to rescue travellers that had gone astray and had been lost in the deep snow of the mountains. This animal had almost human intelligence and seemingly understood all his master said to him. Bob made it a rule to carefully note the behavior of Sport towards his callers, and was quite satisfied to have little to do with those whom Sport disliked; for it is a psychological fact that the instinctive dislike or fear of an animal for a person is an infallible criterion of that person's inner characteristics. Like most well-known men of wealth, Bob had a large correspondence, which, unlike his colleagues in ge1 al, who employ private secretaries, he preferred to attend to himself. At this moment he was reading his morning mail, which was rather voluminous. There were letters from friends, invitations, business propositions and begging letters. The latter from

people who had great ambitions and required nothing but a few paltry thousands to realize them—inventors who stood with one foot upon the threshold of fame and vast fortunes, requiring nothing but the wherewithal to put their inventions upon the market; and there were impecunious actresses of wonderful talent seeking recognition, who had heard of his great generosity, and wanted only a few thousand to form a company to support their genius and make unlimited money; there were others who described financial schemes that would be worth billions to the investors and cause Pierpont Morgan, John D. Rockefeller and other obscure investors to look like the proverbial thirty cents. All these and other letters from unknown beggars and misjudged geniuses, Bob looked over with a smile and transferred to a large waste basket on the right side of his desk. He was evidently looking for a certain letter, and seemed disappointed on not finding it. Rapidly turning over a number of letters he had retained from the others for the purpose of answering them, his eyes suddenly fell upon a tiny envelope, the one he was seeking. "Ah,

at last!" he exclaimed, as he opened the envelope with a small pearl-handled paper-cutter. The letter read:

"*My Dear Bob:*

"Dont forget that you are due at my house Sunday night at eight. I've got a box of new cigars here for you. And, Bob, I've got my filly fixed up for you to look her over; she shines like a mirror, and I know you'll want her when you see her. Say, Bob, do you know pa got ducked again on his last horse? He paid a big price, and now finds he is all looks and no speed. Oh, I told him a very stylish horse is never speedy. But I'll tell you all about it when I see you. Be sure to be here. I'll be awaiting you in my den.

"Yours as ever,

"FANNY."

"P.S.—By the way, Bob, I wish you would order me one of those new Mexican silver bits they are talking so much about. I don't know where to get them, but you probably do. Order half a dozen

different designs and have them sent to the house with the bill. Do it right away, Bob—I'll kiss you for it when I see you Sunday.—F."

"The dear girl!" exclaimed Bob, with a sigh, when he had finished the letter. If she only knew how much I think of her. She is so different from the rest. It's really refreshing to talk to her. There's nothing artificial about her. She is frank and truthful to the backbone, and the only girl I've met that is broad-minded and speaks ill of no one. She is a noble girl, with qualities that few mortals possess. Oh, if I only dared! I'd marry Fanny in a minute. But, then, it's all nonsense. She likes me all right as a friend, a comrade, a brother —anything. But a husband? Ah, that's a horse of a different color, and if I were silly enough to ask her to marry me she probably would tell me to go away back in the grand stand and sit down." He gave a queer little laugh, followed by a deep sigh, and put Fanny's letter in his breast pocket. Just then Sport began to growl and looked toward the door, and directly there was a ring. "Come

in," said Bob, and a moment later Louise, Lady Brighton's maid, entered. With a respectful bow she stopped at the door. "Good day, *Monsieur* Armstrong," while Sport slowly circled about her on a sniffing expedition, and finally, having fully satisfied his canine mind that she could not possibly harm his master, he resumed his favorite spot at the latter's feet, with the air of a dog disgusted with himself for having disturbed himself about so little.

"How do you do, Louise?" politely replied Bob. "Sit down," and he designated a chair on the left of his desk.

Sitting down, the maid continued: "I bring *Monsieur* some news about *Monsieur le Baron* Nicholas."

"Ah, is that so? Glad to hear it. What is it, Louise?"

"Well, *Monsieur*, Baron Nicholas was at the apartment all Thursday and Friday before *Madame's* wedding. He spent zee days in zee library, where he worked wiz zee door locked. No one could get in—not even *Madame la Comtesse*, but

Louise got one leetle peep through zee keyhole and saw him work on zee drawing which looked, *tout-à-fait*, like one banknote. But, neverzeeless, it could have been something else."

"Louise, you are great, great! Anything else?"

"Zee night Lord Brighton was there he had zee long talk with zee *Comtesse*, and after he left *le Baron* and ze *Comtesse* had one terrible fuss. She told him to go, and he smashed all zee parlor furniture and then left, taking zee satchel containing zee drawings he was working on wiz him. Last night *Madame la Comtesse* and Lord Brighton were married."

"Brighton and the Countess married?"

"Yes, *Monsieur*, and they had zee nice little supper after zee wedding with zee friends, and Lord Brighton got a letter from *Monsieur le Baron* stating that he was very sorry he could not be present at the the wedding of his dear sister."

"Is that all?" Bob impatiently interrupted.

"Yes, *Monsieur*."

"Very well, Louise, you just keep right on as

you have been doing. Keep your eyes open and see everything. Here is a little encouragement for you," and he gave her a bill which he took from a wallet. "And, Louise, the more you see the larger the encouragement. By the way, has the Countess anything to do with the Baron's drawings?"

"Oh, no, *Monsieur*, she not know anyzing about his work, and he seem very anxious to keep it from *Madame*."

"Very well, Louise. You may go now, and report again next week."

"Very well, *Monsieur*, and I zank you for your generosity," and bowing profoundly Louise went out.

When she had gone Bob gave a sigh of relief. "Well, I believe I am on the right track. However, I didn't know that Nicholas Ivanovitch was an artist. But here, I've got to drop Fanny a line acknowledging her letter and telling her that I'll be there, rain or shine; and tell her that I'll send up the silver bits."

While Bob is writing to Fanny, Nicholas, after

his parting from Ravenna and his wrecking of the parlor furniture, had left the apartment, foaming with impotent rage. He took nothing with him except a small satchel containing the drawings he had been working on in the library. Upon reaching the street he took a car down town, got off at the corner of Third Street and West Broadway and soon disappeared in one of the dilapidated old buildings that still exist here and there along that thoroughfare. Ascending to the top floor, he drew a latch-key from his pocket and let himself into a dingy little room. The room was one of those which give a person accustomed to light, clean, airy apartments a feeling of indescribable oppression. The ceiling was low and yellow with age. The rags that answered for curtains were black with filth and the dust of months, perhaps of years. The only clean object in the whole room was a single bed, which in contrast to all else was spotless, showing that some one accustomed to clean sheets had recently occupied it. This bed stood in the further corner. The wall about the window was lined with narrow, greasy shelves that con-

tained innumerable vials and flasks of all sizes and shapes, filled with chemicals that exhaled a most pungent and disagreeable odor. In one corner, near the only gas jet, stood a drawing board, and close by a small table, littered with colors, brushes, pencils and drawing utensils. With a sigh of relief Nicholas put down his grip, then carefully bolting the door and placing his hat over the keyhole, walked over to the bed, pulled it aside and touched a spring in the wall behind it. As he did so a part of the wall slid back, revealing a small closet, wherein he carefully deposited his hand satchel. Then he took from an inside pocket a roll of money and likewise deposited it there. This done, he re-shut the closet, pushed the bed back in place and sat down upon it. "Well, I am safe, any way; that's one thing off my mind; and it will be a long, long time before they ever find this little hole. After all, I'm not so badly off. Lots of fellows would gladly exchange with me. If only I had not spoiled my game with Ravenna! But it's too late now. She is not a girl to ever go back on a decision once her mind is made up. Well, I

have only myself to blame, blasted idiot that I am! Really, I begin to think that I am actually in love with her. She certainly did look divine when she gave me my perpetual furlough. Any way, I shall have to forget it and simply think about the money. But here, I forgot something—her diamonds! Oh, I'll have to get *them!* Guess I'll go up there in a day or two. Damn! Won't I make her pay me for this? Won't I! Just wait, Lord Brighton, you'll need all the money you have got, and more, too, ere I get through with you. But, first, I've got to have some sleep." He suddenly stopped in the middle of his sentence and a look of alarm overspread his features. "Bob Armstrong! Why does his name continually ring into my ears? Why do I see his piercing black eyes continually upon me? He'll never remember me. Never, 'tis too long ago. Besides, he could never connect me with the man he saw up the river—the town with the musical name. If he did, my life wouldn't be worth a shilling. But, pshaw! Am I getting to be a coward? Nonsense! I'm going to bed." Saying which he took a revolver from his pocket and placed

it beneath his pillow, undressed and went to bed. A half hour later his deep, regular breathing showed that he was asleep. A moment later a man who had been lying full length upon the floor of the adjoining room, with his eyes pressed close to a small hole in the wall, carefully got up without making the slightest noise and stole down stairs. Reaching the street, he walked up to a seedy-looking individual who was leaning against a corner post and said something as he passed on. The seedy one slightly nodded as the other boarded a car for up town; then he crossed the street and sat down in a hallway opposite the door of the house in which Nicholas was sleeping and began to smoke.

Bob made it a rule to be punctual in all matters, so at the stroke of eight at the appointed day he was ushered in Fanny's den. She was awfully glad to see him, and had Bob been just a bit less modest and unselfish he might have readily seen that this big-hearted girl, who was incapable of deception, could scarcely suppress the deep affection she bore him.

"Hello, Bob!" she exclaimed when he entered, as she took him by the hand and pulled him over to an easy chair and pushed him into it. "There, I fixed this place for you," and she evidently had, for there was a brand new box of rare cigars at his right hand and some fine wine, and cocktails and other drinks upon a small table at his left. There was a little hassock, too, for his feet and a bright fire in the grate. "Oh, Bob, I want to thank you for your kindness in sending me up the bits. I took three, and they are peaches. Look over there by the window," she suddenly interrupted herself, pointing to the window, and when he looked to see what had so suddenly frightened her, she was at his side like a flash, kissed him twice on the forehead, and was away before he realized what had happened. "That's what I promised you, Bob, for sending those bits."

He blushed furiously, but managed to say: "Fanny, you are a dear little woman, and I wouldn't take a king's ransom for this little present."

"All right, Bob. Now light a cigar," and she

took one and gave it to him, struck a match and lit it for him. "Put your feet on this hassock and go ahead with your story. I am just dying with curiosity," and she sat down.

"Well," began Bob, now very seriously, "years ago, when I was a youth of fifteen or sixteen, I went out West and drifted into the mining districts of California."

"Yes, you told me you did."

"But I never told you that when I went West I took my mother and sister with me. Yes, I did, and I want to say that I had the dearest mother that a man ever had. As to my sister, she was a beautiful girl, and I loved her very dearly.

"Well, we settled in a mining town called Drytown in California, and there I went to work as hard as I knew how, digging, prospecting and speculating, while mother and sister kept house for me. I was successful from the start, and my little pile kept getting bigger every day. Of course, we made new acquaintances, new friends, new associates, and, naturally, the greater my suc-

cess the more friends I had. Among them was a young fellow whose fine education, aristocratic bearing, and handsome face soon made him everybody's friend. He had a way of getting around people that was simply irresistible. This young man's name was Herbert Stanley, and though not one of us believed that this was his real name, he was Herbert Stanley to us and no questions were asked. This young man I introduced into my home one day, which I shall never forget, for that day began my poor dear sister's perdition. Martha was a mere child, only seventeen then. From the moment she saw that fellow she was lost to us. She loved him blindly and without reason, and nothing mother or I could say prevailed with her. He, the scoundrel, watched the beautiful girl as she helplessly struggled against the mad infatuation he inspired, and, being an adept in handling woman, he played the indifferent toward her, knowing full well that this was the surest way to deliver her unto him. At the same time this wolf in sheep's clothing ate at our table, enjoyed our hospitality. Mother being busy, and aging fast, did not notice how

—as time wore on—sister's beautiful red cheeks turned paler day by day, how her eyes lost their lustre, how, in short, from a healthy, happy girl she became silent and morose. One day I accidentally overheard a conversation between the two that revealed to me the terrible truth. Martha, poor, dear Martha, was upon her knees before the villain and begged him piteously to save her name and her honor. He, the brute in human form, laughed at her, called her a fool and a silly goose for ever trusting him; adding that she was only one more, and that he would marry no girl with an impaired reputation. At these words my poor sister uttered a terrible cry—a cry that will ring in my ears to my dying day—and fell in a swoon. I, though sick at the time with fever and lying upon the lounge in an adjoining room, seized a pick-axe that stood in the corner and made a jump for this brute; but he was on his guard and warded off every blow I aimed at him, until I finally wounded him and had him on the floor, where I tried hard to brain him. Then, with a supreme effort, he threw me off, pulled a pistol and, aiming

straight at my face, fired. That I am talking to you to-day, Fanny, is due only to the hand of fate, for the bullet, which would have hit me straight between the eyes, glanced off against the blade of the pick-axe, which I instinctively raised, and struck me in the left side. He fired again, and this time the bullet struck me in the chest. I fell in a pool of blood, almost across my sister's prostrate body. He fled. In a few minutes the house was filled with excited miners, attracted by the shooting. Without any one saying a word the whole story was out in a moment, we were picked up, a doctor hurriedly came and pronounced my wounds dangerous, but not necessarily fatal. A howl for vengeance went up from the miners when the full truth became known. Many willing men searched for Herbert Stanley, but he was too wise to be caught; and surely, had he been, he would have been instantly lynched. His description was telegraphed all over the country, and then Drytown, to the great surprise of all its inhabitants, learned that he had been apprehended by the New York authorities and recognized as a man wanted

for various crimes committed in that State; among them forgery, which brought him a long term in Sing Sing—yet to be served.

"As to my poor sister, she lay unconscious for days, was delirious for weeks, even months later; when I began to recover and was able to walk again we laid her away to rest in the little cemetery on the hillside, and I swore upon her grave that if fate ever gave her betrayer into my hands I would kill him. A year later our poor mother followed Martha, and I was alone. But with all my misery fortune had favored me, and my speculations, one and all, proved successful. I was getting rich—very rich—and finally returned East. My first thought was of that scoundrel. I went to the authorities and learned that he was a convict for life. I went to Sing Sing to assure myself that he was there. The prison officials permitted me to see him, but they must have read my resolution in my face, for they watched me closely. But, Fanny, as sure as I am sitting here, I saw Herbert Stanley there, and in a convict's garb. And now, Fanny, comes the important point of my story, which will

explain to you why I have asked a great favor of you."

"All right, Bob. I am waiting for you."

"Well, I believe, or rather imagine, that Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch and Herbert Stanley are one and the same man!"

"Oh, nonsense! You know that's foolish even to think of. It can't be. Why, the Countess, his sister! Where would they get the title—the money —the estates in Russia—the pictures and all? Oh, Bob, that's out of the question!"

"Well, I hope so, and I hope I am mistaken; but if Nicholas Ivanovitch is not Herbert Stanley, then, by heavens, he is his ghost, for just look at this," and Bob handed Fanny the little picture he had so earnestly studied in the smoking-room at the Pennybaker ball.

"By the great Nancy Hanks!" exclaimed Fanny, after a look at the photograph, "it's remarkable, and I can't blame you another moment for thinking you were dreaming when you had the idea. It's *too* remarkable!"

"Another thing, Fanny, that strengthens my

suspicion is this: Where does Nicholas Ivanovitch get his perfect English? If this is his first trip to America, as he claims, then where does he get his knowledge of this country?"

"You can search me, Bobby," put in Fanny, with a shrug of her pretty shoulders.

"I must know the truth, and I will know it. Will you help me?"

"I will, Bob." And as she gave him her hand, she added, "What's more, I want to tell you that I always disliked that man, and he knows it. But what do you want me to do?"

"Simply this. I want you to make Nicholas Ivanovitch believe that you are in love with him, and make a thorough study of him."

"Holy smoke! I make love to that man?" Fanny was silent for a moment. She said at last: "Well, but then I've promised you, and I'll do it, and I'll do it right, too—at least so that he'll never know the difference."

"You know, Fanny, I have had the Ivanovitch apartments watched by the Countess's maid, Louise, and have had astonishing reports," and Bob re-

lated what Louise had told him. "Now, I am going to quietly find out at Sing Sing whether Herbert Stanley is still there; and if he isn't, then we are indeed on the right track."

"But, Bob, how about the Countess? She is a beautiful woman, and I'll bet you my new filly that she is all right, and will make a good wife for Lord Brighton. But what do you think she could have been to Nicholas? For if he is not Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch, who or what was he to her and she to him?"

"If my suspicions prove true, then it is easy enough to guess that she is only another one of his dupes, with the one difference that the Countess is a strong, forceful woman and Martha, poor Martha, was a mild, submissive girl."

"Bob," here broke in Fanny, "I'll help you solve the mystery providing we rule the Countess off the track, for Fanny Chase will never down a woman. Besides, I—I—like that woman, even if she has sinned. And if your theory is correct, and she has been his tool, I am still willing to bet my new silver bits that she never intentionally wronged

any one, and that she has been sinned against more than she has sinned. So let's leave the poor girl out of this and go for him, the real villain."

"Here's my hand on it, Fanny. You are a dear, good girl with a heart of gold, and I know you'll help me. But whatever we do must be done quietly, for Lord Brighton is my friend, and I wouldn't think of besmirching his name."

"Very well; and I will endeavor to get that man interested in me, and X-ray him to a cold finish for your sake, Bob; for, personally, I hate him."

"And I will send a private detective to Sing Sing and find out if Herbert Stanley is still in the chain gang."

"Say, Bob," here interrupted Fanny, "what's the matter with us having some wine?"

He smiled upon her affectionately. "You wait upon me yourself?" he asked. "I am served like a king." She had waited upon a great many people, but none of them had ever told her that. The observation added a lightness to her voice.

"Certainly," she replied, going to the cupboard, where she took from a drawer a musty old bottle,

which she placed before her friend. "Do you know," she said in a confidential tone, "I got a stranglehold on pa's keys the other day and made a raid upon his private vineyard in the cellar to the extent of this. That old bottle is said to be the last of the spiritual survivors from the vintage of the year 17 B.C., so we must drink it with reverence. Pa said it was for special occasions only. Well, this is a very special occasion, isn't it, Bob?" and she smiled happily.

"I should remark it was," replied he, with a good-natured laugh and a nod of his head as he mercilessly twisted the corkscrew into the tender neck of the rare old bottle with the antebiblical history.

"Oh," suddenly exclaimed Fanny, hurrying back to the cupboard, "I almost forgot I've got the finest cake here that ever happened," and she cut him an immense triangular cut out of the big round cake with a frosted top. "I bribed the cook for this."

Then she got two thin wine glasses, which bore the engraved image of a famous jockey's head be-

tween two crossed whips. After carefully wiping them with a napkin she placed them upon the table. While Bob filled them she helped herself to a piece of cake that completely filled her little fist, and bit in it with the vengeance of a cake-struck school-girl. With a smile and a mouthful of cake she said, "This is Bohemianism. Isn't it, Bob?"

"It is happiness, Fanny!" he replied, as he handed her a glass of wine.

As they touched glasses she said: "Here's to the success of the Ivanovitch-Stanley handicap, and may the best horse win!"

"And here's to the sweetest girl that ever made a raid on her pa's wine-cellar."

Bob sat there with his glass in one hand and a huge morsel of cake in the other—eating, drinking, laughing, talking. "I am famished," he said. "I am never tired, Fanny, but always hungry."

"Oh, Bob," here interrupted Fanny, "before I forget it I want to ask you a very s-e-r-i-o-u-s question. I've got a girl friend who's got a friend whose cousin loves a man a few years older than herself and knows he loves her, but hasn't got the

nerve to pop the question to her, although the happiness of both depends upon it. He is either too bashful or too modest. I told her to tell her friend's friend's cousin to advise him to take some of the nerve food they advertise, but she didn't want to believe me. Now what would you advise the poor girl to do?"

Bob turned red like a schoolboy that's being scolded, for Fanny's question was so ludicrously similar to his own case that it went straight home. Yet he managed to reply: "Why—I—I—really don't know what to say. I—I——"

"Look here, Bob," suddenly broke in Fanny with an arch smile, "I want you to think that question over, and tell me next time we meet what you would advise the girl to do. Meanwhile I will call on Lady Brighton and try and get acquainted with her brother, if he is still there." When they had chatted a while longer, Bob said: "I'll have to be going now, Fanny. Good-night."

"Good-night, Bobby."

"By the way, I'll call for you next Sunday and

take you for a drive on the Speedway with my new high steppers."

"All right. What time?"

"Oh, about two."

"Very well, I'll be ready, for I'm anxious to know what they look like. And by that time we will be able to compare dates in our detective work and examine the contents of our drag net. Eh? Good-night."

He hesitated a moment, as if he wanted to say something more, then blushed furiously and rushed out.

When he had gone she stood a moment as if in a dream, then smilingly shook her head with a vibration of the voice. "Poor Bob! I really believe he meant to kiss me. Why didn't he? What a dear he is! And I love him just as surely as my filly's got white feet. Any way, I'll be Mrs. Bob Armstrong or be an old maid, and get a cat, or a poodle, or a canary bird."

CHAPTER VIII

A VICTIM OF ANOTHER'S CRIMES

A COUPLE of days after the foregoing, and while Lord and Lady Brighton were out calling, Nicholas Ivanovitch suddenly reappeared at their apartment, and finding Louise there he sent her out to purchase some paper and stamps for him—an errand which would occupy her some little time.

Louise, not knowing as yet how matters stood, could not refuse obedience to the man who had originally engaged her, although she would have gladly done so in order to watch his movements in the apartment.

Nicholas evidently read her thoughts, or was suspicious, for he stood by the door and watched her until she had reached the street, then he went to the window until he saw her turn the corner of the street leading toward the main avenue. Then he bolted and latched the front door. A moment later

he had slipped a letter into Lady Brighton's private letter-box in the drawer of her dresser, and next he was busy with the systematic searching of her apartment. In a short while he had within his little hand satchel all the valuables, including diamonds and jewelry, the Countess had left at home. This done he took from his inside pocket a letter addressed to Ravenna, unlocked the door and sat down in the parlor to await the girl's return. When he heard her come in he met her, took the stationery and stamps and told her to keep the change she had received, and handed her the letter for Lady Brighton. "Louise, I shall be unable to await my sister's return, and therefore wrote this letter, explaining my visit. Give it to her on her return." With these words he opened the door and passed out. When Louise had made sure that he had gone she hurried to the library and held the letter he had given her over the radiator. In a few moments the hot air had liquified the mucilage which held the envelope together. Hastily sitting down, Louise picked up a pencil, and in a very short time had a shorthand copy of Nicholas's

letter to his sister; this she hid in her bosom. She then carefully re-sealed the envelope and placed it upon the dresser in Lady Brighton's pale blue boudoir. Louise next hastened to her own room, locked her door and made a complete translation of the shorthand copy she had taken. This letter she addressed to Bob Armstrong, with a footnote explaining the incidents surrounding it. Throwing a shawl over her head she hurried to the corner, mailed the letter and was back long ere Lord and Lady Brighton returned. When they came in, Louise said: "*Madame, Monsieur le Baron* waz here while you were absent, and being unable to wait he left a letter for you, which I have laid upon zee dressaire of *Madame*."

"Thank you, Louise," was all Lady Brighton said, as she walked to her boudoir, while her husband repaired to his own rooms. Ravenna was visibly annoyed as she gazed upon the familiar handwriting. It seemed as though she wanted to obliterate from her mind and heart everything pertaining to her former oppressor. However, she hastily tore open the envelope and read:

"RAVENNA: You have stated that all between us is over. Be it so. But I have come to the conclusion that the time and trouble I've had and your stubbornness in refusing to ensnare Lord Brighton into helping me in my schemes, is worth a great deal, and constitutes a serious loss to me. I have, therefore, taken the precaution to collect a small part of the indemnity you owe me, until such time as you can redeem it." Here Ravenna stopped reading, and with a face full of supreme disgust exclaimed: "My jewelry! And this is the brute whose slave I've been! Has he fallen so low as to rob me of the few trinkets I had? Well, well!" Then she continued reading: "It would be foolish for you to say anything about your loss, for it would injure you more than it would me. Furthermore, I expect a large sum of money for my silence. A word to the wise is sufficient.

"NICHOLAS."

"The coward!" exclaimed Lady Brighton, tearing the letter and throwing the pieces into the waste basket. "Does it seem possible that a man can

sink so low? Oh, I don't regret the jewelry. And as to the money, what do I care for money? But to be rid of him—oh, just to be free from the shameful past! Ah, there's the difficulty. I would give worlds to have never known him. Shall I confess—tell all to my husband? Lord Brighton is kind and good; he loves me deeply, I'm sure. But what if he would scorn, despise and loathe me now that I love him? Good God! I can't do it, can't risk it! It would kill me! Rather bear the shame and sorrow of this dark secret than perhaps lose the one and only true heart left me in the wide world. I am so miserable, so wretched when this thing comes up in my mind!"

Just then with a violent start her soliloquy was interrupted by the footsteps of Lord Brighton in the hall, and she hurriedly removed all traces of her deep emotion. At that moment he called to her outside of her boudoir: "May I enter, darling?"

"Yes, Oliver. Come in."

"Ah," he exclaimed, seeing that she still had her hat on, "I thought you had changed and made

yourself more comfortable. "You naughty little woman!" and he took Ravenna in his arms and kissed her passionately. "Oh, my love, do you know that my life has but begun? I have never known what happiness meant until you became mine."

"Oliver," replied Ravenna, with a sweet caress, "I know you love me with all your heart, but will you always love me, and will nothing ever change your affection for me?"

"No, dear, there is absolutely nothing in the wide world that could mar our happiness. My love!" and he again kissed her.

"Well, supposing," hesitatingly continued Ravenna, pressing her lovely figure like a frightened deer against Lord Brighton, "suppose I was a bad woman, a very bad woman, and not as good as you think I am, would you still love me?" and she looked into his face with a world of anxiety unsuccessfully covered by a forced laugh.

"What nonsense, my treasure! As if there could be anything bad or vile about you. Come, dearest, quit your teasing me, it hurts; and simply

remember that I am all yours—heart, soul and body!"

"Dinner is served," announced Louise, and Lord Brighton excused himself and walked to the dining-room, while Ravenna hastily exchanged her shopping-dress for a pretty loose dinner-gown. There was pain and disappointment upon her lovely face—disappointment because her husband, despite his great love for her, had failed to answer her question outright, and because she instinctively feared that with his high sense of honor and family pride Lord Brighton would rather lose her for ever, though it would break his heart, than countenance anything dishonorable in her past. Though she was in the possession of her husband's love Ravenna's life became a veritable torture for fear that he might at any moment discover the truth of her former disgrace. The day following the one on which poor Lady Brighton was so terribly shocked by Nicholas's infamous robbery and letter she had occasion to go out in the morning, while Lord Brighton remained at home to attend to some correspondence. It was about 11 A.M., and Louise

having accompanied her mistress on her shopping tour, Lord Brighton was alone in the library. He had finished his letters, and lighting a cigar was reclining in his arm-chair, thinking of Ravenna. His beautiful wife was ever uppermost in his mind, and if he had ever been a woman-hater at heart, he certainly had lost every trace of it now, for he was most charmingly assiduous, entertaining and obliging toward her. And it ought to be said in his favor that in all probability he had been misjudged by his friends in so far as women were concerned. At this moment Lord Brighton was pondering what surprise he could give his wife on her return home. After cudgelling his brain for a few moments, he exclaimed: "I have it! I'll give her a check for the handsomest automobile that can be bought and hide it somewhere where she may find it." He, therefore, wrote a check for $25,000, payable to the order of Lady Brighton. Carefully folding it up he went to his wife's boudoir, in order to find some safe place, accessible to her only, where he could hide it. Opening the drawer of her dresser, he laughed indulgently at the many

little things—ribbons and nick-nacks dear to a woman's heart—that he saw there. But how could he secrete so valuable a paper among all these little objects—tortoise-shell combs, powders, ribbons, belts, hat and stickpins, purses, lucky pennies and so forth? He was about to give up the search when his eyes fell upon a small plush box with a tiny gold lock and little gold handle. "A letter-box!" he exclaimed. "Well, I won't go through my wife's letters, that's certain, but I'll just lay the check upon the top, so she can't miss it—that is, if the box is open. Picking it up he saw a tiny gold key suspended from the lock. He opened the box and found it filled with a bundle of letters, some yellow with age, others of recent vintage. He was about to place his check on the top of them, when in so doing he disarranged them, and in readjusting the package one of the letters fell upon the floor. In picking it up his gaze fell upon his own name, plainly written in a large masculine hand. Now, is there any one among the readers of this veritable tale who can blame Lord Brighton for wanting to know more about the person using his

name? Very likely not. At any rate he opened the folded sheet of pale blue linen paper and read. A moment later the letter dropped from his shaking grasp. His hand clutched frantically at his heart. He turned ghastly pale, and reeling backward fell upon his wife's bed, where his fingers convulsively buried themselves in the spotless linen, while he moaned as if in awful agony. Ten minutes passed, twenty, half an hour had elapsed, and still Lord Brighton moaned. Then suddenly he became quiet. Slowly, painfully he rose. His face was livid and scarcely recognizable. There was in his demeanor that awful calm which presages the storm and portrays the most dire of human emotions. Mechanically, automaton-like, he picked up the letter and placed it in his pocket. Then carefully readjusting the other letters he relocked the box, returned it to the drawer and closed the latter. The check he tore into small bits, threw them into the fire and watched them till consumed. He slowly walked toward the door. Then he turned and looked back as if to take a last farewell of a happiness there consummated, but now forever dead.

Then he walked into the drawing-room and sat down on the divan, where he could watch the desolate scene in the park across the avenue. Not a muscle in his face moved. His eyes and face were haggard. In the short half hour Lord Brighton seemed to have aged twenty years. The deep melancholy that had settled about his mouth alone proclaimed the agony in his heart as he sat there, sphynx-like, awaiting Lady Brighton's return. While in the person of this tortured and now practically heart-broken man one of life's real dramas is nearing its consummation, let the reader subject the letter in his inside pocket to a mental X-ray and see what terrible revelation it contained. The text of the letter was as follows:

"My Sweetheart: Despite my desire to be with you and in your arms, I have been quite unable to call upon you since the ball, where you made such a phenomenal hit with the baldheads, and especially with his lordship, who will prove the biggest fish that ever swallowed bait—hook and all! Say, he's worth millions, and we need millions! I admire

you, pet, for the clever way in which you managed the old man. And when you made love to him it was so funny that I stuffed my silk handkerchief in my mouth to keep from bursting into laughter. At any rate that Englishman will be the biggest catch we ever made. He will be an easy mark for your rare skill. Now, darling, keep right on, and we will soon have money to incinerate. Many kisses from your ardent

"NICHOLAS."

Lord Brighton had been waiting motionless in the same position for nearly two hours when he heard the key turn in the lock outside and the voices of his wife and maid. A moment later she entered. Lady Brighton looked beautiful in her well-fitting shopping gown. There was the flush of excitement and good health upon her cheeks. She had made many purchases, and consequently felt happy. When she saw Lord Brighton she dropped the parcels she carried upon a chair, rushed over to him and kissed him affectionately. "Oh, have you been waiting long, dear? I am so

sorry." Lord Brighton never moved. He simply waved her aside with his left hand while with his right he pulled out his fine silk handkerchief and wiped the place where she had pressed her lips. Then he got up and said in a tone so cold and icy that she shrank back in terror: "You will be good enough to await me here." With these words he threw the handkerchief with which he had wiped her kiss from his forehead into the fire and left the room. He went to the dining-room, found Louise, who was unpacking some of the many things that the chauffeur had just sent up in the elevator, and said: "Louise, I desire you to remain in this room until I will let you out in about an hour. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir," tremblingly replied the maid, reading in Lord Brighton's ashen face that there was something amiss. Moreover, she knew already that he was a stern disciplinarian that wouldn't bear the slightest contradiction.

Turning, Lord Brighton walked out of the room and locked the door behind him. When he had gone Louise, who, hypocrite though she was, loved

her mistress, fell upon her knees and prayed: "Holy Father, protect the poor woman in there!" then she trembling sat down to await developments. Meanwhile Lady Brighton, not knowing the cause of her husband's remarkable behavior, had become almost hysterical from fear and anguish. Her face was deathly pale. She felt an awful crisis was at hand. In her eyes there was the expression of helplessness, together with the mute terror of the deer at bay. Lord Brighton reappeared. He advanced toward his wife, and pointing to a chair for her, said in an icy tone, "Madame, sit down."

Mechanically she obeyed, unable to move or utter one syllable. Her husband now took a seat opposite her and continued: "Countess Ivanovitch, will you be good enough to inform me who you are? Wait, do not disturb me, please," he added harshly. "Hear me until I have finished, then you may speak. When I ask you to kindly inform me as to who you are, I mean that you should now drop all prevarications and simply make a clean breast of the entire game, which you and your—ah—ah—l-o-v-e-r have been practising upon me. I wish to

know all—all!" Lord Brighton spoke slowly and distinctly, carefully articulating each word.

"Why, why, Oliver, why, what do you mean?" she stammered, pale to her parched lips.

"I mean to say, Countess Ivanovitch—if this should accidentally be your name—that you are an adventuress and a woman with a past! I likewise want to say to you that when I married you I did so in the belief that you were a good, honorable woman, and that you would in time learn to love me. Since then I have found that in marrying you I have married simply a creature without honor, self-respect, or virtue—in fact, the companion and mistress of a criminal and blackmailer, for whom you have acted as a medium. You and your lover have deliberately planned to rob me of my wealth, blackmail me in the capacity of your husband. You have succeeded in one point—namely, in becoming my wife. My personal pride, and the honor of an Englishman's name, social position and family cannot in my case be dragged through the mire and then aired in the divorce courts. Thus I shall not endeavor to force you into a separation

which necessarily would cause a scandal. No, I shall pursue an entirely different plan, madame. You must disappear. Disappear for ever! You understand me, do you not? For you will readily see that I could not afford to come in contact with a demi-mondaine who ensnared me into an ignominious marriage, which I could easily have dissolved by merely proving your character, and whose very presence would be a reminder of a foul and despicable intrigue of which I am the victim."

While Lord Brighton spoke Ravenna's head gradually sank upon her breast. Her agony was too great to bear, but at the word "demi-mondaine" she suddenly sprang to her feet with heaving bosom and flaming eyes—blue-black with the intensity of indignation. So deeply aroused was she that a red mist seemed to fill the room; her nails convulsively tore at the tender flesh of her hands. Drawing herself up to her full height she said, with an air of queenly disdain:

"You lie! Before God, you lie, and if I were a man I would kill you!"

Lord Brighton merely shrugged his shoulders and laughed. "Don't act, madame; please don't. Or do you think your dramatic poses impress me? Why, madame, a woman who has portrayed love as you have portrayed it to me—and God knows how many others—is bound to be a great actress, and can portray anger as well. As to your threats, I could not possibly fear a creature of your character."

"Lord Brighton, are you mad? Do you realize what you are saying?" here interrupted Ravenna, exasperated by his awful sarcasm.

"Do I know what I am saying? Perhaps so. But in case that you—my beautiful Countess—might possibly entertain doubts upon that point I will prove it to you," and he handed her Nicholas's letter. "It would have been a good idea to hide your charming correspondence better. Don't you think so? Ha, ha, ha!"

"Hide it? What do you mean?" gasped Ravenna. A cold shiver ran between her shoulders when she took the extended letter and hastily glanced at it. "Why, this is not mine. It was

never received by me. It was not among my things."

"You are foolish to attempt denial, for the letter was among your private correspondence."

"That letter among my private correspondence? Never!"

"That is where I found it, my charming Countess. You should have been more careful when you destroyed the others."

"It's false! I never saw that letter before! I swear it!"

"Oh! What is the use of prolonging this scene, madame? You have stooped too low for me to waste further time and energy upon you. You are too hardened a criminal to confess even when caught. But your arts are futile. Here! I tell you what you can do. It's the only way. Take some speedy acting drug and do the world and me a service by taking yourself off—and we will call the incident closed. As to your lover, alias brother—why, I may kill him on sight!" and Lord Brighton rose to go with a hoarse, terribly discordant laugh.

By this time Ravenna was completely beside her-

self. She looked a veritable Medea. As she glided toward Lord Brighton, her eyes flashed like live sapphires.

"Sit down, sir!" she commanded in a vibrating voice. "How dare you suggest suicide to me? You ask me to take myself off? Why, you are insane. Who are you, pray?" And stepping back at arm's length she contemplated him with a look of scathing scorn. "I—kill myself—just to please your lordship's mood? Ah, I think not! And what is more, let me say to you, Lord Oliver Brighton of London, England, that the very worst woman in the world is infinitely better and purer than a thousand of your kind; for when we come down to real facts, what are you men but selfish brutes that have so far degenerated that chastity and purity in your sex is looked upon as a vice, a paltry thing to be ridiculed and laughed at? Yet these very qualities of godlike perfection you seek in the woman of your choice, not because you admire or enjoy them. Oh, no! But only because in your vanity and self-conceit you desire to own them, and because this same conceit would

suffer if the object of your fancies should have been unfortunate enough to have the smallest blemish upon her escutcheon, her character, her morality —morality! a thing you men never possessed. Why do you place the woman you elect to wed upon a pedestal of such inaccessible height? Certainly not because of your own exalted moral cleanliness, but because it hurts your vanity. If the woman falls short, and the idol you have foolishly worshipped from an altogether impossible standpoint, turns out but human and of ordinary clay, then you men are the poor misused martyrs, and nothing is too vile, too base to say about the victim of your insulted vanity! Still you claim to be gentlemen, Christians and civilized beings. Do you ever stop to think—you poor martyred men —that no woman ever saw her downfall or first *faux-pas*, except through one of your sex as the original cause? Do you ever realize that the unfortunate women you would crush, persecute and condemn as impure, despicable outcasts, are such only because of having trusted one of your noble and exalted sex? Who is it that gives a woman the

first help down the path that leads to Hades? Men! Who is it that points to the unfortunate ones with scorn? Men!—pure men! Only one thing more," continued Ravenna, laying stress upon it as a wholesome means of enforcing Lord Brighton's attention. "As to my confessing! I have —never wronged you—hence, I have nothing to confess. Unwillingly and innocently I have been the tool of others, yet I have never deceived you, and my intentions toward you were pure and honorable. You claimed to love me—yet you do not even accord me the common decency due me, and prefer to place faith in a miserable piece of paper, a letter—the work of a blackmailer, a scoundrel!"

"Oh, what is the use of prolonging this scene, madame?" he sneeringly interrupted her.

"There is no use! As to the letter, Lord Brighton, you may keep it as a memento of the infamy of one of your own sex." With queenly bearing, her head slightly thrown back, she walked to the door, opened it and said, "And now, Lord Brighton, permit me to facilitate your exit."

CHAPTER IX

"THE HORSEY GIRL"

AFTER having been locked in the dining-room by Lord Brighton, as related in the last chapter, Louise had managed to reach the front of the apartment by means of the fire-escape and her latchkey to the front door. Thus she had heard everything, and immediately after Lord Brighton's departure she found Ravenna upon the drawing-room floor delirious with grief. She at once sent a message to Bob Armstrong, asking him to send a physician with haste and call himself in person. When the doctor came he diagnosed Ravenna's case as one of prostration due to nervous shock, the cause of which he failed to understand. He wrote a prescription for a sedative, gave full directions to Louise and left, promising to return the next day. Bob came and had a long conversation with Louise, who told him all. He was deeply touched by the sufferings of

Ravenna, who in her ravings continually spoke of Lord Brighton and her lost happiness. Bob was a man of action, hence the first thing he did upon leaving the Countess's apartments was to find out whither Lord Brighton had gone. He learned that that nobleman had left orders to have his mail transferred to a prominent uptown hotel, whereupon Bob immediately went to Fanny, to whom he told all he had learned.

"The gin-drinking Englishman!" exclaimed she when he had finished. "He ought to be ashamed of himself to treat her in such a shameful manner, no matter what she has done. My opinion is that she is a whole lot too good for him." With these words she pushed an electric button and summoned the butler, whom she ordered to have her filly saddled and at the door inside of fifteen minutes.

"Where are you going, Fanny?" asked Bob with some surprise.

"Why, to the Countess Ivanovitch, of course," she replied. "She needs a friend right now, for she is all alone except for that little maid, and I

am her friend, and I don't care who knows it. So I am going up there, that's all. Say, Bob, you know that maid is a right good sort, for she shows a lot of real sympathy for poor Lady Brighton in her trouble, and you know that's rare in maids. But what about Nicholas? Do we want him to leave us at the post and get away?"

"He can't," replied Bob earnestly. "He's being shadowed day and night, and I am merely awaiting a wire from my detective in Sing Sing to nab him," and Bob told Fanny how he had engaged the Pinkertons on the case, and how Nicholas's entire career here and abroad had been subjected to a most searching investigation, a full report of which he was to receive that night. Whereupon Bob, after promising to see Fanny that night at Lady Brighton's, returned home, while she mounted her filly, and a half hour later was at Ravenna's apartment. She found her prostrated with grief, shaken by dry convulsive sobs. The smallest details of this wretched chain of events projected themselves before Ravenna as she watched the miniature of Lord Brighton upon her dresser.

Fanny laid her hands gently on her. She shook them off with as little difficulty as if they had been a feather, such was her excitement.

Louise was bathing her forehead with ice-water. Fanny was deeply touched at this display of sympathy and compassion on the part of a mere hireling.

"Louise," she said, "I came to take charge of my friend's trouble, and I want you to go and take a rest. You don't look any too well yourself. Take this little token from me with the assurance that there is always a position open for you at my father's house should you need one. You are about the only woman I've seen since Nancy Hanks who would help another woman in distress," and she handed the astonished girl a twenty-dollar bill.

Louise, although speechless with amazement at this unexpected generosity from a comparative stranger, managed to stammer her thanks as she took the money with an obeisance.

"Now go and take a good sleep, Louise. I'll attend to everything until you return, but be sure

to be back at six o'clock to-night, as I shall have an important call to make at that time."

"*Certainement, mademoiselle*," replied the girl as she left.

When she had gone Fanny took off her hat, rolled up her sleeves and began bathing Ravenna's head with ice-water. The poor woman, whose tortured mind had temporarily given way under the many blows that had befallen her within the last few days, was now tossing feverishly upon her pillow, sometimes crying bitterly, sometimes laughing hysterically. The name of Lord Brighton, Nicholas, the words honor, infamy, deception, all were jumbled together in incoherent, hallucinatory sentences. Again she would lie perfectly quiet for a few moments, with a sweet, angelic smile upon her beautiful face. The next she would say, with a sadness that was intensely pathetic:

"Oh, don't cast me from you, Oliver! I love you! My heart is hungry for your affection, your love, your kindness. I am not a bad woman! I want to forget and be happy. Oh, do not leave me!"

Fanny sat motionless during these moments of hysterical grief. Her whole heart seemed to go out to this unfortunate woman, so young, so charming and yet so unhappy. Putting her arms about the Countess's neck, she kissed her repeatedly and said:

"Don't fear, dear, I'll attend to your case, and if I don't thaw that English icicle out my name isn't Fanny Chase. Come, lay your head down upon my arm, dear, while I soothe you," saying which Fanny gently laid the Countess's head upon her left arm, and began tenderly stroking her cheeks and hair with her right. 'Tis said that the deeper human emotions and the contact of those thoroughly in sympathy with our sorrows produce marvels, and it surely seemed so in this case, for under the tender caresses of this sweet woman a wonderful quiet came over Lady Brighton. Her face, drawn with the mental agony she had labored under, relaxed, and for a moment a peaceful smile illuminated her features as she said, "My heart is so sad," and with half-closed eyes she buried her face upon Fanny's bosom, while convulsive sobs

shook her frame. Fanny knew that she was slowly but surely recovering her mental equilibrium, and she redoubled her efforts. All at once Lady Brighton gave a deep sigh, and started, as if suddenly awakened out of a deep slumber, and sat up exclaiming, "Where am I?"

"You are at home, dear, with friends," gently replied Fanny, as she kissed the unhappy woman. "You have been ill, but you are getting well; just lie down and rest."

"Ah, yes! I remember you, Fanny. You were at the Pennybaker Ball." Then her face softened. "It is so sweet of you to come to me when I haven't a friend on earth left. God knows we all have need of friends! Every one is gone now. I am all alone! I feel so alone in this great, wide world."

"Don't worry, dear," sweetly and assuringly answered Fanny. "You will be happy yet, for this dark cloud will surely pass. Bob Armstrong and I are your friends—your real friends—and we are going to free you forever from the brute who has marred your life, blasted your happiness and endeavored to ruin your future. Lord Oliver, too,

will come back to you, penitent for having doubted your loyalty and ready to forget and forgive."

"I fear not," whispered Lady Brighton almost inaudibly with a sad shake of her head.

"Why not?"

"Because our paths no longer meet."

"Oh, no; don't say that, Ravenna."

"Fanny, my life has been made for me."

"My home is open to you."

"That is just like you, but society, your world, has no—place for me."

"No one need know of that unfortunate *mésalliance*."

"It is kind of you to call it by that name, but you cannot hide its real character with the broadest mantle of charity at your command. Curses always come home to roost; and now, to-morrow will come and the world will know."

"The real facts in the case, dear, need never be known."

"That's true, but I have been known as his sister, he who, reports now say, is an ex-convict and criminal of the worst type."

"I regret to say, Ravenna, that we all know that, but it isn't your fault."

"Oh, no; but the world at large is not like you. Oh, I am very well known, no doubt—in a way. You couldn't hide me unless you put me in a casket; there alone I should soon be forgotten."

"Ravenna, dear, I am your friend, and socially I can and will see you to the post!"

"No, dear, in your heart you cannot forgive me."

"I have never blamed you."

"God bless you, Fanny! you are a noble girl; but it is best that you leave me and forget me, as others have done."

"Never; it is my duty to help you in your trouble."

"You can't help me. You are honest and earnest, I know, but you are innocent of the portent of this question."

"I am going to try and set it straight.

"Your effort shows the nobility of your mind, but you are in the minority."

"Don't forget the fable of the lion and the mouse, Ravenna."

"I don't, and I am sorry to confess that, like so many old fables, this one is faulty, and does not apply. Look here, I have committed the one crime of a woman's life—the one for which society has no absolution."

"It must, and it shall absolve; it is never too late to mend."

"That's all right and true, too, for men, but for our sex no; the gate is shut. There is no workshop built by modern Christian civilization that will repair a woman's shattered character save a tinkering one."

"Oh, dear Ravenna, what do you mean?"

"This—no matter what the temptation may have been, or how sincerely she may have repented, or how free her conscience may be from wilful wrong-doing, the woman who has once erred is labelled a damaged article."

"We will defy society's false edicts."

"You can't do it. Society is the most despotic of all rulers on the face of the earth. It is true, Fanny. The hero of a score of escapades, after he sees his follies, or is satiated with them, more

likely, is taken in hand by society's leaders, scolded as a naughty boy, who has sowed his wild oats, they hope, and will settle down, take a wife—and be good! How infamous, while the world grows narrower toward a woman with a blemished name. It narrows to obscurity, it narrows to a convent, sometimes to a suicide's grave. Why, even the saints in their missionary work, with very few exceptions, pull aside their skirts from the damaged woman for fear of contamination. Only the men sometimes have a kind word for her, and how they pat themselves on the back for it; as if it were not fear of their opinion make many timid, good women afraid to do the same."

"Oh, it is true, and shameful because it is true.

"Look here, Ravenna, you must not let such morbid views get the best of you. Go to sleep now, and remember that you have one friend who will see you through, even if the track is a little heavy, so just get rid of these ideas and take a good sleep. Everything will come out all right, I'll promise you. With papa's wealth and influence

Fanny Chase will make society's false edicts a misdemeanor. There will be no two different moral standpoints for men and women. What is right for the one must be proper for the other. Thus instead of woman being labelled damaged, she, too, will be taken in hand by the highest of high society makers, scolded as a naughty girl who has sowed her wild oats, they hope, and will settle down, take a husband—and be good. How lovely! Come, now, go to sleep," and Fanny patted the excited, feverish woman until she fell in a deep slumber, which probably saved her mind. The doctor who called during her sleep found her condition very satisfactory, but told Fanny, who was sitting by Ravenna's bed, that she would probably be ailing for a long time unless something could be done to overcome the terrible grief caused by the nervous shock she had suffered. Fanny, who was a fine judge of human nature, understood the kind old man of science, and said: "I know, doctor, it is not medicine that will cure Lady Brighton. Am I not right?"

"You are indeed, Miss Chase, and if you can

help her to regain her lost happiness then my services will henceforth be needless here."

Fanny simply gave the doctor her hand as she led him to the door, and said: "Doctor, rest assured she will get well. I will cure her."

A little while later Louise ventured to Lady Brighton's bedside, and almost simultaneously with her came Bob. After instructing the maid to let her mistress sleep under all circumstances Fanny met Bob in the library.

"Fanny," said the latter as soon as they were alone, "I have important news for us. Read this," and he handed her a telegram. It was dated Sing Sing, and read:

"MR. BOB ARMSTRONG, NEW YORK CITY: Have identified Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch *alias* Herbert Stanley. He is convict No. 4036 of Sing Sing Prison, who escaped seven years ago. Have Pinkerton's man arrest and hold him until I reach the city with former guard for complete personal identification.

"SAM FLOYD, *Detective.*"

"Bob," exclaimed Fanny when she had finished, "let's go now and make sure of him before he escapes us. Have you all the letters and the one pieced together by Louise?"

"I have," replied he, trembling with excitement at the thought that after long years of waiting he had his poor sister's murderer at his mercy. "Come, Fanny, let us go at once," and taking the girl's arm they went down stairs where Bob's coupé was waiting.

An hour later they were at the entrance of the house on West Broadway where Nicholas had been hiding for the past few days, thinking himself perfectly secure and all unconscious of the fact that he was surrounded by Pinkerton's detectives, who watched his every movement. Bob signalled to one of the men on watch near the door, and after ordering him to gather his men together for the arrest, had the coupé driven around the corner where it would attract less attention. This done, he asked Fanny to remain in the vehicle while he would go up and help the officers arrest Nicholas, but to his surprise Fanny refused.

"Not on your merry-go-round, Bob Armstrong. No, sir, I saw the start of this race, and I am going to see the finish; besides," she added, with a loving look and a low, sweet voice, "I want to be on the firing-line if you are, for this man is a desperate criminal."

Bob was too deeply touched by her words to make a reply. He realized at this dangerous moment the sincerity of the young girl's friendship for him. He merely pressed her hand and kissed it. Then Fanny taking her riding-whip, they walked together around the corner, going to the hall of the house where Nicholas's room was located. Four detectives were awaiting them there. One of these was stationed at the front door, another on the second floor, so as to prevent all escape should Nicholas attempt to force his way through. Thereupon Bob and Fanny and the other officers silently slipped upstairs, where they were met by their colleague, who had rented the room next to Nicholas, and had been systematically watching him. Placing his finger upon his lips as a signal for them to be silent, he informed them in a whis-

per that their man was sleeping soundly. He had tried Nicholas's door repeatedly during the latter's absence, and had found that he always locked and bolted his door securely at all times. They therefore concluded that they would have to break it in. When they had settled upon this plan as being the most feasible, the detectives drew their revolvers; and while Fanny and Bob stood guard at the staircase landing, the three officers put the combined weight of their shoulders against the door. For a moment the stout oak resisted their efforts, just long enough for Nicholas to jump up, grab his revolver and face the door as it went to pieces. The officers jumped in simultaneously, the foremost exclaiming, "In the name of the law you are our prisoner." He had hardly uttered these words when he received a terrific blow upon his pistol-hand, and the weapon fell to the floor. The next moment he was seized in a vice-like grip by the collar and dragged against the rear wall of the room by Nicholas, who, having instantly comprehended the terrible odds he was facing, had quick as a flash disabled the officer and made a shield of him.

"Make one move, and I will blow your brains out!" he cried, and the approaching officer instinctively felt that he would not hesitate a second to carry out his threat.

"Surrender, or we will fire!" shouted the officers, advancing upon Nicholas.

"Come on, you cowards!" mockingly replied the man at bay, knowing that they would not dare to shoot for fear of killing their colleague. At that instant one of the officers made a quick jump, thinking he would take the young desperado by surprise; but he had miscalculated his man, for Nicholas fired even before the officer could reach him. The bullet struck the detective in the neck, and he dropped almost at his foe's feet. Infuriated at his friend's defeat, the other officer ducked, and with a quick movement was almost upon the desperado when Nicholas fired point blank in his face, killing him instantly. Then releasing the man he was holding with his left, he dealt him another stunning blow on the head with the butt of his revolver, dropped him like a sack and made a jump for the door. There he was met by Bob, who pis-

tol in hand was just rushing in. The momentum of Nicholas's onslaught as he was endeavoring to escape was so great that it threw Bob momentarily off his guard. It was merely a second; but it was sufficient for Nicholas to recognize his mortal enemy, and with an oath he levelled his pistol at Bob before the latter had time to raise his weapon. It seemed as if Bob was doomed, and that crime would triumph after all. But Nicholas never fired; for in his eagerness to get away he had stepped out from the door of his room, which brought him directly in front of Fanny, who had stepped to one side when the shooting began. In a flash the girl saw Bob's danger, and almost as quick as sight she brought the heavy, lead-filled end of her riding-whip down upon Nicholas's bare head with terrific force just as he was about to fire. The revolver dropped from his hand, and for a moment he reeled as if intoxicated, then he staggered backward into the room as several officers, attracted by the shooting, rushed up the stairs. Stunned by the blow from Fanny's whip, Nicholas sank down upon the bed. He was a powerful man and struggled hard

to retain his senses. When he looked up and saw Bob and the officers entering the door he uttered an oath, and ripping open his vest he tore a small vial from an inside pocket, and before they could prevent him he had swallowed its contents.

"Surrender in the name of the law!" shouted the officers.

"Never! You'll never take me alive!" defiantly replied Nicholas, who had turned ghastly pale.

"Quick, a doctor!" suddenly exclaimed Bob; "he has taken poison!"

"I'll cheat you, after all, damn you!" feebly added Nicholas. The next moment his head fell back, a convulsive tremor shook his frame and he was dead. When the coroner came and the room was searched it was found that Nicholas, aside from his many crimes, had been a counterfeiter as well, and had quite successfully disposed of his product. Great pressure was brought to bear to keep the identity of the criminal out of the papers, and, strange to say, the effort succeeded. The inquest,

too, three days later, was strictly private. During the course of the same the remains of the erstwhile Baron Nicholas Ivanovitch were identified by a former guard from Sing Sing as being those of convict No. 4036, a prisoner who in some miraculous way had succeeded in escaping from the prison seven years before.

Lady Brighton was gently infomed of Nicholas's terrible fate, but though she had suffered unspeakably at the hands of him whose victim she had been, she was far too kind-hearted a woman and too good a Christian to carry resentment beyond the grave. The knowledge of being now really free from his influence greatly aided her recovery. But she was broken-hearted nevertheless. Like a drowning man clutching desperately at a floating spar to save his life, so this poor woman in her misery had frantically clutched at Lord Brighton's heart when he offered it to her that memorable night. But the improvement in her condition was physical only; mentally she seemed hopelessly stricken. She passed hours motionless upon her bed or divan, brooding over her misfortune, her

sweet, pale face full of sadness and despair, lighted sometimes by deep, searching eyes, which oftenest were hidden by their long, dark lashes.

Two weeks had passed since Nicholas had been buried. Every day Fanny had come to see Lady Brighton, endeavoring to cheer her up; finally promising Ravenna to bring some of her friends. But though her endeavors were most kind, and caused the unhappy woman to cling to her with pathetic tenderness, she saw that nothing would ever restore Lady Brighton to her former self except her husband's love and forgiveness. And indeed to secure Lord Brighton's return to his wife was Fanny's chief object. She had merely desired to wait until the effects of the exciting events of the past two weeks had begun to disappear. Now Fanny made up her mind that it was time to bring this proud Englishman to his senses. She therefore obtained from Bob all letters bearing upon the relations between Countess Ivanovitch and the late Nicholas, ordered her filly, and having previously made an appointment with Lord Brighton, was soon ushered into his private parlor at his

hotel. On this portentous occasion Fanny wore her characteristic outfit—that is, a well-fitting riding habit, derby hat and riding boots. In her hand she carried the inevitable riding-whip, not the one, by the way, that had saved Bob's life, for the latter had confiscated that the day following Nicholas's death. She had waited about ten minutes when Lord Brighton appeared. At the first glance Fanny saw that though proud and obstinate, he had suffered keenly during the three weeks of separation from his bride. He looked aged and haggard, and deep, black circles about his eyes bespoke sleepless nights and mental anguish.

"You must pardon me, Miss Chase," said he as they shook hands, "for letting you wait so long. I am usually very punctual. I was unavoidably detained, and had but just come in."

"Oh, don't worry about that," politely replied Fanny, sparring for an opening upon the subject that weighed upon her heart.

"Lord Brighton," she began with her usual devil-may-care air, "do you know why I came here?"

"No, Miss Chase, I do not know what affords me the pleasure of your visit."

"Then let me tell you. I came here to inform you ere it is too late that you are committing a cold-blooded, premeditated, malicious murder in the first degree, and that you ought to be ashamed of yourself."

At these words Lord Brighton stood as if nailed to the floor. He looked at Fanny in blank amazement, as though he meant to ask her where she got the nerve to speak to him like that, then he said, "Miss Chase, did I understand you aright?"

"You certainly did, Lord Brighton, and I want to add that you are a downright villain, or you would not condemn on circumstantial evidence."

"I fail to understand you, Miss Chase," replied Lord Brighton, getting excited despite himself. "You are quite an extraordinary young woman, I must say."

"That is nothing, Lord Brighton, others have said it before you, and though I may be extraordinary, I have at least a heart, and you haven't."

"Miss Chase, pray will you have the goodness to stop a moment? And may I know why you have come here to insult me, knowing that being a gentleman I could not retaliate?"

"Oh, certainly, and what is more, you consider my remarks insults because they are true, for truth hurts, you know, Lord Brighton."

"Will you kindly inform me, Miss Chase, to whom or what you are alluding?"

"With pleasure. I am alluding to Lady Brighton, your poor wife, of course."

"I beg your pardon," interrupted Lord Brighton with a painful gesture. "There is no Lady Brighton, and if you refer to the woman who has fraudulently caused me to marry her, then I beg to call your attention to the fact that it is a most painful subject to me, and one that I refuse to discuss with you. That woman is unworthy of my name."

"You are mistaken, Lord Brighton, you are unworthy of hers!"

Lord Brighton flushed with anger and jumped up. "Miss Chase, be kind enough to remember

that you are in my rooms, and if you continue in that strain I may forget that I am a gentleman."

Fanny got up, and stepping close to Lord Brighton, who towered nearly a foot above her, she placed her arms behind her back, looked up into his angered face, and said:

"You will have no trouble in forgetting it, for you do not act the gentleman. Besides, I want to tell you, Lord Brighton, that the individual that could frighten me is not born, so just let us drop all flowers of speech and talk like sensible people."

"Miss Chase!" cried Lord Brighton, wounded and astonished.

"Oh, don't 'Miss Chase' me in that tone. You mean, selfish Englishman—don't! The idea of trying to frighten me with your English airs. 'Miss Chase!' I tell you not to 'Miss Chase' me, for I'll not submit to it! I never knew such a thing. The way in which you treated and disgraced your wife—it is really infamous! Now, Lord Brighton, if you have no sense of decency, I have. You'll please to allow me to go on with my story un-

molested." With this Fanny bounced across the room and sat down.

Lord Brighton had never met any one like Fanny Chase before, nor could he quite understand her, but being a man of great physical courage, he couldn't help admiring this brave girl, so he said rather gently, "Very well."

"Well, here are the facts. You have made a terrible mistake, and have wronged the truest little woman that ever lived; in consequence Ravenna is slowly dying at her apartments with sorrow and grief. She loves you with all her heart and soul. You will be her slayer if she dies, for you are the direct cause of her illness by accusing her, simply because of a letter you found against her. Had you stopped long enough and learned all that had transpired at the apartment since your marriage, all this trouble might have been avoided. Instead of that, you have condemned and crushed the wife of your bosom upon purely circumstantial evidence, and I don't believe in circumstantial evidence, do you?"

"But, Miss Chase, will you tell me how I am to

explain the relations between Countess Ivanovitch and Nicholas? Can you explain why she married me? Can you disprove the letter you call circumstantial evidence?"

"I can, Lord Brighton, and you are wrong, altogether wrong about that letter. It proves nothing. It is a base fraud, perpetrated by that cowardly criminal for the sole purpose of turning you against your poor wife, who was absolutely innocent of deceiving you."

"My God!" interrupted Lord Brighton, "if you could prove that."

"I can prove it, and in more ways than one. Here, for instance, is a letter addressed to Ravenna by Nicholas, wherein he chides her for refusing to ruin you, and revenges himself by stealing all her jewelry while you and she were out shopping. It was picked out of Lady Brighton's waste-basket, and pieced together by Louise," and she handed him the letter.

When Lord Brighton had read the infamous epistle, which at once revealed to him the real depth of Nicholas's depravity, and at the same time con-

vinced him of the terrible wrong he had inflicted upon his poor wife, big tears rolled down his face, and taking both of Fanny's hands, he said in a voice choked with emotion, "Miss Chase, I am a brute and a villain and all that you said, but it is not too late yet to remedy my error and atone for my wrong. Heaven may help that infamous wretch Nicholas! I will kill him on sight if I have to hang for it, and——"

"You are too late, Lord Brighton, Nicholas is dead."

"What? Dead? Thank God for that! There is justice in heaven after all! But tell me about it," and Lord Brighton in feverish haste pulled Fanny back into her chair, taking a seat opposite her; for all that had transpired since he left his wife's apartment was news to him, since he had not left his hotel for a week, and in his grief and indignation had denied himself to all callers. Fanny then told him all that had occurred, and when she had finished Lord Brighton said, with profound emotion, "Miss Chase, you are a grand little woman, and if you will forgive me for my narrow-

mindedness and be my friend, I shall feel highly honored."

Fanny merely pressed his proffered hand, for her heart was too full of happiness at the thought of the joy she could bring to poor Lady Brighton. She made Lord Brighton promise, however, not to call upon Ravenna until the following day, when she would have her prepared for the momentous meeting. He gave Fanny his word, and personally saw her to her filly, holding her stirrup. When she rode away with a happy smile and a polite gesture of good-by, Lord Brighton slowly walked back to his apartments, where he locked himself in. "What an abominable brute I am. We men do not know women's hearts. They are too subtle for our masculine conception. We never will know them. And yet they say there is no nobility among women. My God! can I realize it I am to see her again!" and he folded his hands in mute ecstasy. "What a noble little woman that Fanny is; a perfect diamond in a rough shell. No wonder every man who knows her admires her." That night Lord Brighton went to bed a happier and a

better man. He had met something he had not counted on, a woman with a heart. He thanked God that the world contained such a woman, who could break through all conventions and come to him as she had done. The maltreated but unquenchable love for his wife again rose and flooded his heart, drowning out all lesser and baser considerations. He realized that life could be nothing to him henceforth without her.

CHAPTER X

ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL

ON leaving Lord Brighton Fanny rode straight over to Ravenna's apartments. Her face was radiant with happiness, for she was fully conscious of having done a noble deed. She was eager to bring the sunshine and good news of which she was the bearer to the poor suffering woman. Louise, on opening the door saw at once that Fanny was happy, almost gay, and her own face lighted in unison.

"Louise," said Fanny, handing the little maid a bill, "you have done your mistress a great favor, and the letter you so laboriously pieced together may bring back happiness to poor Lady Brighton. So you may now go and take an evening off; go to the theatre or wherever you wish, and return about twelve or one o'clock. I will remain with your mistress until you come back."

Louise took the money and bowed profoundly

and beamingly. "Oh, I zank you, *Mademoiselle*, for your goodness to me. I will be back by twelve o'clock. Good-night," and she went. Fanny tip-toed into Ravenna's room thinking her asleep. The room was half dark, and Ravenna did not stir. Carefully, noiselessly she approached the bed. To her surprise she found Ravenna wide awake, and too deeply absorbed in painful thoughts to notice her presence. Suddenly she clasped her white hands over her bosom, while large, silent tears slowly trickled down over her wan cheeks; her lips moved: "Ah, Oliver, why did you leave me? Why did you refuse to trust me? Why did you refuse my hungry heart the comfort and happiness of your love? I did not deceive you! I could not deceive you, for I love you. And I am so lonely, so unhappy!" and with a moan she buried her face in the pillows and sobbed hysterically.

Fanny, who listened merely to satisfy herself as to her friend's mental condition, now approached, and gently, tenderly lifted the unhappy woman's head from the pillow. "Ravenna," she said, in a voice so full of kindness and sympathy that it

brought momentarily a smile to the face of the sufferer. "Now, dear, put your little ear to my mouth, I want to tell you something awfully good."

Ravenna moved back and looked searchingly at her friend. There was such joy depicted upon Fanny's face that the sick woman turned pale with the anticipation of some great emotion, the next moment she had put her ear to Fanny's lips.

"Ravenna," said Fanny, "I saw some one to-day whom you love, and I had a very nice talk with the gentleman. Will you be a good girl and not worry any more if I tell you who he is?"

Ravenna was too full of emotion to answer, but her eyes pleaded volumes as she again put her ear to her friend's lips. "'Twas Oliver, dear," Fanny whispered sweetly, "and he said I should give you his kindest regards."

"Do you mean that, Fanny?" eagerly exclaimed Lady Brighton.

"I do, dear. Lord Brighton was very nice, and —and he may come to see you to-morrow if you will be good and not cry any more."

Ravenna said not a word; but her eyes closed, and with a deep sigh that seemed to greatly relieve her overburdened heart, she buried her blonde head upon her friend's bosom. Fanny understood human nature too well to break the rapture which at that moment filled the poor woman's heart, and so a few quiet, happy moments passed. Finally Ravenna broke the silence. "Fanny, dear, this is your work. How shall I ever repay your goodness?"

"Nonsense, dear, I am not doing anything, except what we all should do for our fellow-creatures when they are in trouble. Just don't mention it. I want to see you happy, dear, and if you remain always my true friend I shall feel amply repaid. Now, dear, since you know my happy secret in part only, I may as well tell you that your husband will call here to-morrow without fail, and—and won't you get well now?"

"Oh, dear, sweet friend, happiness is all I ask. I—I feel better already."

"Now listen to me. I want you to lie down and go to sleep, for you want to look your best to-mor-

row, do you not? I will arrange your lovely blonde hair for you in the morning. So go to sleep, dear, and dream of happiness to come."

With these words Fanny kissed Ravenna tenderly, and went into the library so as to give her the needed chance to go to sleep. When she returned a half hour later and tip-toed up to the bed, she was amazed at the change that had taken place in the face before her. Ravenna was lying upon her back, her long, beautiful blonde hair covering the pillow in graceful profusion. There was a subdued flush upon her cheeks, her lips were half parted, as if ready for a happy smile, her left hand was over her breast, as if trying to control the tumultuous emotions of her heart. She had never looked so charming; and Fanny, as she sat there by her friend's bedside, looked the veritable angel of goodness she was. To look at Fanny now it was impossible to any longer cherish the erroneous belief so prevalent, that woman is woman's worst enemy. As a matter of fact, they are not; and in all greater issues of life women are indeed women's best friends. For proof of this one need only look at all that has

yet been accomplished in their behalf. Is it not the work of woman?

About nine the next morning, after Ravenna had partaken of a light breakfast, Fanny helped arrange her hair prettily, then she sent Louise downtown to do some shopping for her; in reality it was to prevent any possible third party from being present at the reunion of husband and wife. The wheels rolling through the soft snow made no sound, and no one heard the traveller who quietly alighted and tip-toed gently in.

"She must be already up," he said to himself, while his heart beat at the thought of so soon clasping his precious wife in his arms. He hesitated a moment in the hall, then bounded upstairs.

Fanny let him in. When they had shaken hands, she said to Lord Brighton, "Be careful with your wife. She is a tender-hearted woman, and loves you devotedly. Take her back to your heart, and keep her there forever, until life's journey for you is ended, for she is worthy of any good man's love. I will leave her to you now." With this she pressed his hand and went down stairs, where she mounted

her faithful filly and rode home, one of the real heroines in life's unseen drama.

Lord Brighton was deeply touched by Fanny's words. He gently turned the knob, and stood still on the threshold of his wife's room.

"Come!" cried a sweet voice. He sprang forward. There was a cry of joyful ecstasy from the bed, and the next moment he was upon his knees at her bedside.

"Oliver," she whispered, "have you come at last?"

"Forgive me, darling!" He choked back something that seemed to hurt his throat as he took the trembling woman in his arms.

"I forgave you long ago, dear," she whispered, "for I love you—oh, so dearly."

"Sweet soul, you shall never suffer again through me. I swear it. Let me atone for the wrong I've done you by my devotion to you in the future. Let us both begin life anew."

For reply Ravenna simply kissed him. Then she said:

"Oliver, you asked me the other day to confess

to things I had not upon my conscience. Now since you are mine once more, and we are reunited never to part again, I will tell you the story of my life. Sit down by me, dear, and let me rest my head upon your breast—so."

"Never mind," tenderly replied Lord Brighton. "Do not worry yourself, darling. I trust you fully, and was a brute for ever having doubted you."

"No, Oliver, it will be best for me to relieve my heart. I want you to know all, besides my confession will prevent all future complication, especially since the cause of all my troubles is no more, and by confessing I can hurt no one. But listen. My maiden name was Suvalof, Ravenna Suvalof—a name famous throughout all Russia, if not the world. When I was fifteen there came to our home a young student, Count Nicholas Ivanovitch. He was clever, handsome and dashing. I was foolish, inexperienced, unacquainted with my own heart. I was also said to be beautiful and prematurely developed. I was never submissive; quite the contrary. They called me self-willed, head-

strong and obstinate. Yet when I was in this young man's company my will was gone. Try as I would, his will predominated. At that time Count Nicholas enjoyed a good reputation. He soon realized the strange hypnotic power he exercised over me, and though I did not love him then, he easily persuaded me to marry him, and I would have done so even against my own will had he demanded it. After our marriage I soon found that my husband was not what he seemed, and that he had upon his conscience many misdeeds, overlooked by the Russian authorities by reason of the exalted political and financial standing of the Ivanovitch family. But soon, very soon, my husband committed some crime, the nature of which I never learned, and despite his family he was imprisoned, with a long sentence hanging over his head. I then wanted to return to my girlhood home, but I found its doors were closed to me forever. Alas! I went from Pontius to Pilatus to secure Nicholas's release, and finally succeeded through the influence of the kind-hearted Czarina, with the understanding that he must leave Russia forever. We came

to America together, where I hoped that he, whom despite his many faults I had learned to love, would start life anew. I was bitterly disappointed, for once here in America, where the laws are far less strict than in Russia—indeed, a mere farce by comparison—Nicholas drifted from bad to worse; and though he never told me of his schemes and occupation, I knew that he was not leading an honest life. His conduct towards me, too, underwent a marked change, and I was forced to work for my own support or starve. Nicholas was gone months, sometimes a whole year at a time, and finally disappeared altogether. I searched for him for a while, and finally returned to Russia, where I was received with open arms by my family, who believed that Nicholas was dead. My love for him had gradually faded into indifference, and in my heart I was glad to be rid of him, when suddenly about two years ago I received word that he had secretly returned to Russia in search of me, and asking would I see him once more. I went, despite the promise I had given my parents never to see him again should he ever reappear. When

we met he seemed changed. He was dressed faultlessly, his manners were excellent, his treatment of me gallant and he had a large amount of money. He begged, threatened, and finally commanded me to return with him to America, where, he said, a large fortune was awaiting him, adding that he had turned over a new leaf, and was earning an honest livelihood by speculating in stocks and bonds. Once more, and to my sorrow, I trusted him, despite my suspicions. We had no more than returned to America when his conduct towards me became altogether unbearable. He began to use his hypnotic influence over me to further his schemes, and though I now loathed and despised him, I was powerless in his grasp. I prayed to God that some one might rescue me from his strange influence. When his money began to dwindle down he ordered me, whom he had introduced into the best society here, to attend the Pennybaker Ball, and there endeavor to impress some rich man with a view to marriage, informing me at the same time that our marriage in Russia had not been a marriage at all, but simply a mock ceremony, and

that I was free to legally contract a marriage if by doing so I could financially assist him. I promised, but in my heart I vowed that, should I be fortunate enough to meet a good and honest man, I would embrace the opportunity to forever separate from him, and be liberated from the unbearable hypnotic power I was under. Then, Oliver, you and I met. You were kind and good to me; sincerity spoke from your eyes. I knew and felt in my heart that, were you to offer me your name, I should be able and willing to maintain its honor and dignity, and perhaps love you. I tried to be honest, and told you I did not as yet love you; but soon, very soon, I found that you were dear to me, and that I was happy when you were near me, and, to-day, Oliver, I do love you dearly," and Ravenna nestled closely to her husband's breast, with a look full of sincerity and pathos as she added: "And, God knows, if ever a woman has tried to be good and fair to the man to whom she had given her whole and undivided heart, that woman was I."

"Of course, little one," Lord Brighton interrupted her, "and I deserve just punishment for

the worry I've inflicted upon you; but I'll promise you, upon the honor of an Englishman, that you will never have cause again to complain of me, and, darling, I wonder," as he tenderly took Ravenna in his arms, "that I could have ever lived without you. My past existence seems to me like an utter blank." And again he kissed her hands with a lover's first ardor.

"I tried to tell you my past," she went on, "but couldn't. I dreaded the consequences. Then, too, reason spoke and asked why was my past yours more than yours was mine? But tell me, dear," she added with a radiant face, "are you certain that you regret nothing?"

"Regret?" he exclaimed. "How can I regret anything when I have you?"

She slipped her hand through his arm and looked in his eyes with uplifted face.

And now, dear readers, let us leave them to the joy of their reunion. I have tried my best to set down on paper a true record of facts, with all their faults, their joys and sorrows, such as took place only a short time ago.

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